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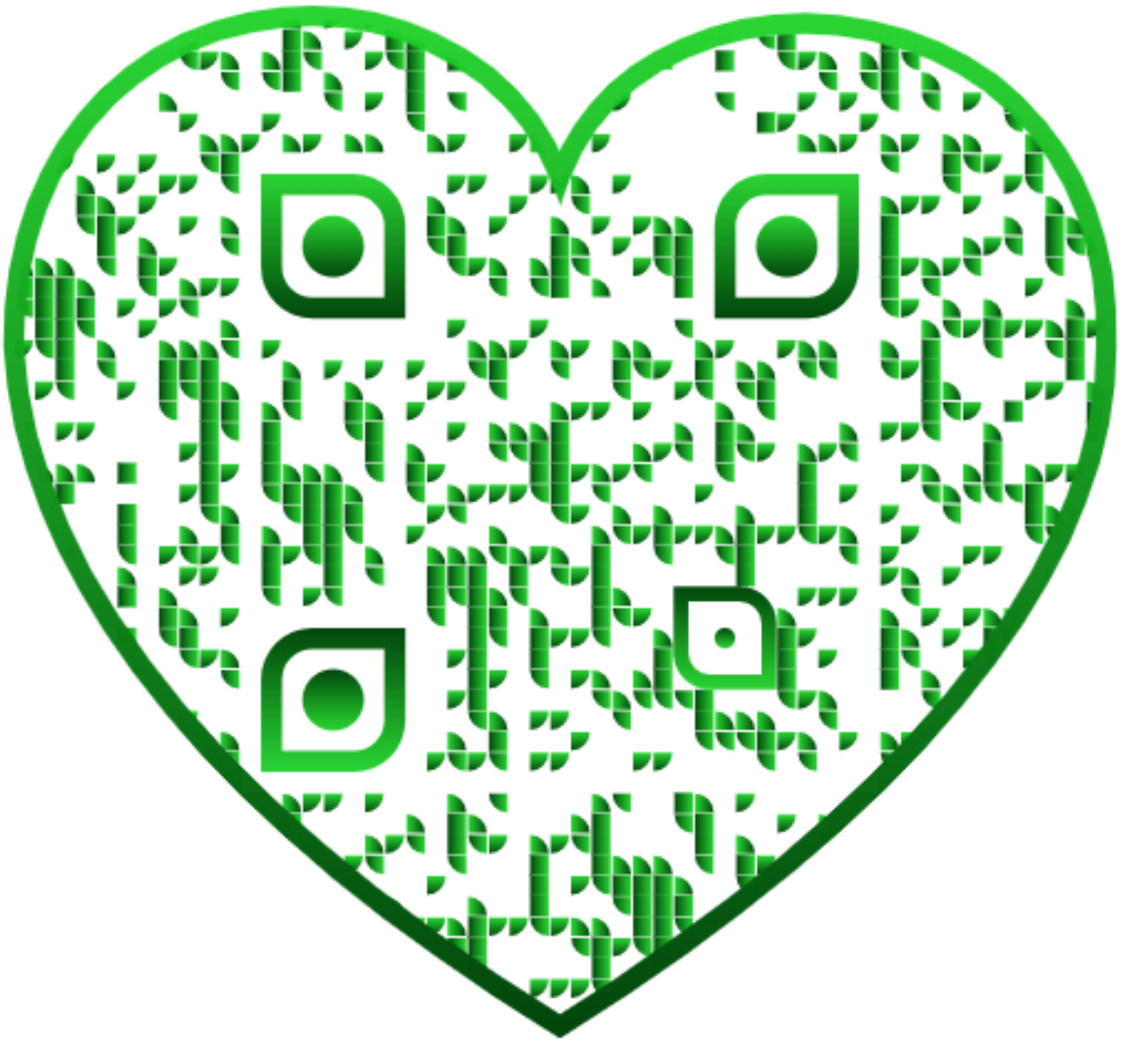

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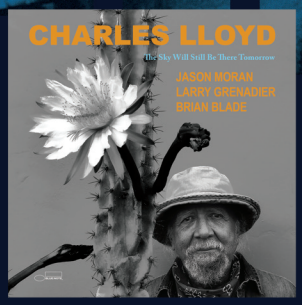

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inside

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20 Chick Corea
Elektric Memories
BY BILL MILKOWSKI

During his six-decade career, Chick Corea won 27 Grammys (four awarded posthumously) and was nominated 72 times. And now, nearly three years after his passing on Feb. 9, 2021, there's been a deluge of Corea music in recent months, courtesy of Candid Records, including a pair of previously unreleased live recordings.

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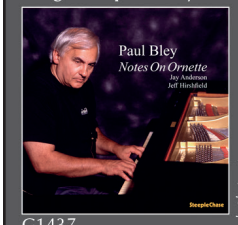

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Scat Jazz Club in Fort Worth, Texas, points the way.

To the Basement!

THERE'S AN IMAGE OF LIVE JAZZ THAT goes something like this: You wind your way through a narrow street and down a flight of steps to find yourself in a small room with a low ceiling and a seemingly magical aura. The band goes on and the space delivers improvised music in away that is one part pure, one part visceral and entirely spellbinding.

That image holds for a very good reason. Jazz clubs *are* very often found in the basement of a building, as this year's International Jazz Venue Guide attests. Of course, The Village Vanguard, that most venerable of jazz haunts, serves as the quintessential basement club, but it's far from the only one.

In New York City alone, you've got plenty, including Smalls and Mezzrow. In Mexico City, Zinco Jazz Club is a really cool space tucked into the basement of an old bank, complete with the vault.

If you ever make your way to Frankfurt, Germany, make sure to stop in at the Jazzkeller, a club that's been around since 1952. Another gem that can be found a few steps down, it's packed with the history of the bebop era as it found friends and fans in Europe. And when the place is packed on a Friday night, rest assured, you'll make friends.

Head down to Texas to check out Scat Jazz Lounge in Fort Worth, a quaint club in the basement of the historic Woolworth building. Tucked into an alley with a well-lit sign that definitely points the way down, Scat focuses on local talent and a high degree of coziness.

The Jazz Bar in Edinburgh, Scotland, was created by the late Bill Kyle in 2005. His story, like every club owner's, is one of determination and grit. Leases lost, fire disaster, heavy loans to be repaid and a few good friends who lent a hand helped the club sustain. It's now under the management of his daughter Edith.

In France, Le Caveau de la Huchette is housed in a building dating back to 1551 that was once a meeting place for the likes of the Templars and later became a secret Freemasonic lodge. But since 1946, it has served up jazz seven nights a week, no secret about it.

And when it comes to old-world charm, the cellar that houses Prague Jazz AghaRTA in the Czech Republic is even older. Long occupying the basement of a 14th century building, AghaRTA's arched stone ceilings and doorways give the club a one-of-a-kind sound and feel.

What is it about a room with no outside view, tucked below the rest of the world, that appeals to us? Maybe it's because those lower-level locales draw us away from the hustle of the street, offering a shared space of refuge where we can shut it all out for an hour or two. It could be a sense of exploring the unknown — taking a chance, heading downstairs and discovering mad scientists at work conjuring sheets of intriguing sounds. Or maybe it's just the simple fact that basement space is usually cheap, and perhaps the best and only option for the many jazz clubs operating on tiny budgets. Whatever the case, next time you're in a jazz town, look a few steps down and see if there's a spot with great music to be found just below street level.

There are more than 100 clubs and venues — many above ground, several subterranean — listed in this year's Jazz Venue Guide, which starts on page 37. We hope you see a few you've already hit, and some to your bucket list. And by all means, if we blew it and missed your favorite club, drop us a line at editor@downbeat.com. **DB**

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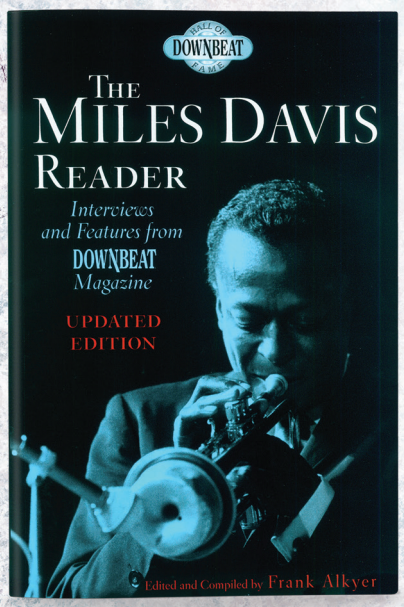

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Chords & Discords

Retire the Polls?

I've been a DownBeat reader since the late '60s, and have previously suggested that perhaps it's time to retire the Readers and Critics Polls on the basis that comparison is invidious, and the presumption that everyone is giving it their best shot. Thus, I was heartened to note that in his Blindfold Test in the November 2023 issue, Bill Frisell chose (per Ashley Kahn) "not to rate any of the music using … the traditional 5-star system." Welcome, Mr. Frisell, to the distinct minority.

RICHARD FREEMAN VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Thanks, but I think you'll remain in the minority!

Artemis, *In Real Time*

The annual Reader's Poll edition is always "one of my can't wait to read" issues. However … how is the Artemis album *In Real Time* NOT in your list for Album of the Year, yet they are Jazz Group of the Year? If I recall, that album wasn't even part of your initial list to choose from. (I think that was a reason). May I also add, how does Christian McBride & New Jawn's *Prime* not make it as well? Those two were real head-scratchers.

KEVIN MCINTOSH
STERLING HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN

One More Thing… About Richard Davis

I appreciated Michael J. West's thorough obituary for bassist Richard Davis [November Beat article]. I knew Davis' career was diverse, but I didn't know it was that diverse. Obviously it's impossible to cover every detail of someone's life in a minimum of space, but I think it's worth noting that Davis also played in Albert Ayler's band at John Coltrane's funeral. Thank you for the tribute.

JIM REIGN
HAMILTON, ONTARIO, CANADA

Short & Sweet!

If anyone has earned a Kennedy Center Honor, it is Herb Alpert.

MARSHALL ZUCKER
WANTAGH, NEW YORK

Brötzmann Mea Culpa

Ouch! "We are happy to note the great saxophonist's passing." This is the DB-answer as Editor's Note to reader John Veylupek's criticism of not taking rightful notice of Peter Brötzmann's passing (November Chords & Discords). Oh, dear! I'm still mourning, and the editor is "happy to note." Please kill this nefarious (you might say misinterpreted) "happy" and run a proper obituary for one of the biggest icons of improvised music! Peter was a real gentleman and honest personality of highest integrity. I sorely miss him and his groundbreaking music making. At least Pharoah did find his way to the cover of DB and received his critical appraisal! Late enough.

REINHARD SOMMER
GRAZ, AUSTRIA

Editor's Note: Reinhard, please accept my sincere apologies. It was a poor choice of words. I am sure there will be an opportunity to properly say goodbye to Peter Brötzmann soon. Yes, he deserves more than we were able to offer at that time. Again, apologies.

In Defense of Opinions

In reader Martin Wisckol's mini-screed of a letter to the editor ("Lo the Tedium," November, Chords & Discords), he lambasts long-time DownBeat reviewer John McDonough for what Wisckol calls an "irreligious review" of Mehmet Ali Sanlikol's album *Turkish Hipster*.

He also proclaims that McDonough should no longer be allowed to write for DownBeat, because your veteran writer has become what we used to refer to as a moldy fig.

If Mr. Wisckol had his way, then only reviewers who could meet his standards of being "hip" and "insightful" (his words) would be allowed to express an opinion.

I, for one, would never waste time reading a music magazine espousing that sort of narrow-minded, journalistic credo.

My suggestion to Mr. Wisckol is to read George Orwell's *1984*.

Like reviewer McDonough, that book has been around for a good while — but it just might teach Wisckol a thing or two regarding the pitfalls of restricting people's thoughts and opinions.

CHARLES WINOKOOR
FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

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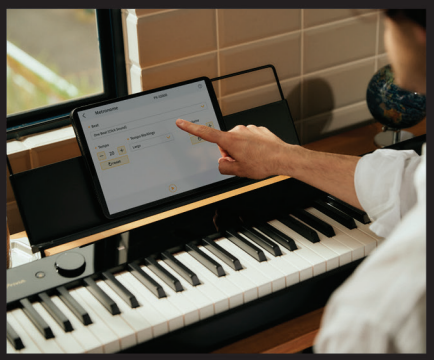

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KWAKU ALSTON

"I'm a father, mentor, teacher, bandleader and activist," says Keyon Harrold. "All of these things are happening at once. We all need some kind of barometer to help us stay grounded."

Keyon Harrold, Real Life

Inside trumpeter, singer and composer Keyon Harrold's workroom hang three call-to-action signposts: execution, hustle and grind. Collectively, he calls them "the Keyon Experience." He says those visual mental notes are scattered throughout his Los Angeles home to remind him to stay humble and remain willing to grow, personally and professionally.

"We have so many things going on in our lives," the Grammy-winning Harrold said via Zoom in late November of last year. "I've got real life happening. I'm a father, mentor, teacher, bandleader and activist. All of these things are happening at once. We all need some kind of barometer to help us stay grounded."

Much of that grounding anchors Harrold's newest album, *Foreverland* (Concord Jazz), the long-awaited follow-up to his 2017 album, *The Mugician*. Just as he alluded to "real life happening" for him personally, quite a few historic, worldwide flashpoints also occurred within those five years. The world experienced a worldwide pandemic beginning in March 2020; just two months after the pandemic began, the world erupted with Black Lives Matter protests in the aftermath of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police; the U.S. government experienced a contentious presidential election, which led to the defeat of former U.S. president Donald Trump. The following year began with the Jan. 6 riot on the U.S. Capitol, spurred by U.S. presidential election result deniers and later Russia invaded the Ukraine. In 2023, a new violent conflict between Hamas-led Palestinians and Israel ignited on the Gaza Strip.

With all those weighty events and more serving as backdrop, *Foreverland* sounds like a musical balm. Harrold's iridescent trumpet tone and elegiac melodicism careen over a program of hybrid jazz hip-hop and modern soul in a mostly unhurried fashion. Often, the album recalls Stevie Wonder's mid-'70s classic LP *Fulfillingness' First Finale*, which contemplated on sociopolitical themes, religiosity and affairs of the heart, so gently at times, that the biting messages of some songs eluded listeners

KWAKU ALSTON

After 23 years in New York City, Harrold relocated to Los Angeles to pursue film-scoring opportunities.

'He taught people how to play music for free. That's how I learned how to play the trumpet.' **—Harrold on his grandfather**

if they weren't paying close attention.

Foreverland opens with the meditative "Peace Of Mind," on which Harrold's soothing tenor croons "Gonna try to find that peace of mind/Can't control things outside/Own your peace inside/Situations are going to test you/Feel light" amid a celestial soundscape of swirling electronic textures and Robert Glasper's plaintive piano accompaniment. Soon after, Common enters with introspective rhymes as the rhythm section pushes the song forward with a lumbering hip-hop beat. As the song progresses, Harrold's melodic lines on trumpet soar across the arrangement like an eagle gliding over the horizon.

"Peace Of Mind" becomes *Foreverland*'s guiding light as the album continues with "Beautiful Day," perhaps the album's most pronounced nod to Stevie Wonder. This time, PJ Morton handles lead vocals as well as the keyboard's thick, rubbery bounce as he sings "Look at the sun shining/Why don't you like the sunlight line?" atop a medium-tempo groove. It's the kind of song that one sings after recovering from heartache.

The album's pulse picks up on "The Intellectual," a moody instrumental on which Harrold's mellifluous lines navigate Chris Dave's jagged drum beats, Burniss Travis' sensuous bass lines and Shedrick Mitchell's graceful piano accompaniment.

The suspenseful "Gotta Go (Outer Space)" is another instrumental gem that this time features cinematic keyboard work from BIGYUKI and torrential drumming from Marcus Gilmore.

In addition to the aforementioned, *Foreverland* also features other noteworthy guests like guitarist Nir Felder, keyboardist Greg Phillinganes and singers Jean Baylor and Laura Mvula. Harrold conceived of the album in 2021 while celebrating his 41st birthday in Las Vegas.

A year prior, Harrold's then 14-year-old son was racially profiled inside the lobby of Arlo, a New York City boutique hotel. A white woman falsely accused his teenage son of stealing her smartphone. Harrold captured the harrowing incident on his phone. That video went viral in a year when racial tensions in the U.S. had already reached a feverish peak.

Growing up in Ferguson, Missouri — a St. Louis suburb that caught fire after Michael Brown was gunned down by the police in 2014 — Harrold had already witnessed how brutal racism can unfold when it comes to Black America. Sadly, the incident involving his son was all too familiar.

"My job as a parent is to teach my son that at any given time, that he could face what I've already seen while I was growing up," Harrold says. "It just so happens that at the age of 14 he was being judged not by his character but what he looked like. That's so unfortunate, but at the same time, I think it's one of the biggest learning lessons he could have. At a certain point as a parent, you have to let your child go and hopefully they will be able to stand on their own two feet, be able to understand what is happening and be able to survive."

Besides Ferguson's long simmering racial tension, Harrold does have fond memories of growing up there. He mentions the great musical legacy of St. Louis — Miles Davis, Shorty Baker, Fontella Bass and Donny Hathaway, to name a few of the city's heroes. Harrold also gives his own family a major shoutout for his musical upbringing, particularly his grandfather, a police officer who led the Memorial Lances Drum and Bugle Corps.

"He taught people how to play music for free," Harrold says of his grandfather. "That's how I learned how to play the trumpet."

After high school, Harrold arrived in New York in 1999 to attend the New School University and study music. There he met some illustrious contemporaries including Glasper, saxophonist Marcus Strickland and singer Bilal. When Common was assembling a touring band to support his 2000 hip-hop classic *Like Water For Chocolate*, Harrold played trumpet. Since then, he's worked with a litany of jazz, hip-hop and soul stars that include Gregory Porter, Beyoncé, Erykah Badu and Jay-Z.

After 23 years of living in New York, Harrold relocated to Los Angeles, in part, to continue his exploration into film scoring. He'd already supplied the trumpet lines for Don Cheadle's portrayal of Miles Davis in the 2015 biopic *Miles Ahead* and worked with Glasper on the TV series *Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty*.

"I moved to Los Angeles to try something different," Harrold says. "I want to do more film scoring. Being in Los Angeles makes doing that more accessible. Every now and then, you got to change it up so that you can create some new vibes." *—John Murph*

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"Everybody thought I was smooth when I was growing up, so they called me 'silky,'" Sean Mason says. *The Southern Suite*, his new album, proves it.

Sean Mason's Southern Spirit of Celebration

PIANIST-COMPOSER SEAN MASON LIVES in New York — he moved there in 2018 to attend Juilliard — but he remains deeply immersed in the cultural heritage of his hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina. He summons this birthright on his 2023 debut album, *The Southern Suite* (Blue Engine Records).

"This album is really a personal documentation of [my] time in the South and how that inspires who I am now," Mason said. "But it's also a microcosm of the opposing themes of traditionalism and modernism. I'm exploring these things, musically."

Central to Mason's musings on these themes are some deceptively simple questions. What is tradition? At what point is something deemed modern? Who gets to decide what these terms mean?

"I tend to be an optimist," he said. "And I see a through line. For every type of music that falls under this name 'jazz,' the through line is the blues. And the blues isn't an experience — it's a mindset."

Mason's probing creativity — along with his obvious maturity as a musician — doubtless impressed saxophonist Branford Marsalis, who first met the young pianist at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where Mason earned his undergraduate degree. Branford began to mentor Mason, later introducing him to his brother Wynton, who helms both the jazz studies program at Juilliard and Jazz at Lincoln Center (which owns Blue Engine Records).

In acknowledgement of Branford's influential guidance, Mason wrote "Kid," one of eight tracks on the album; with its angular movement and infectious bounce, the composition recalls Branford's own piece "The Mighty Sword."

"It feels like recess to me. You can just play," Mason said of his new tune. "The form and harmony are very simple because I wanted to root them in 'traditionalism' and just blow on triads. That was an inspiration from early New Orleans, pre-1940s jazz: to keep it simple in that regard."

Mason also likes to keep his melodies simple, and he often leans into pared-down motivic lines, repeating them for emphasis. This compositional device has differing effects across the album's program — the cyclic phrases might pack a wallop, as on "Kid," or seduce the ear, as on "Lavender." The latter, with its bluesy horns and attenuated tempo, demonstrates in particular how clearly Mason grasps the power of understatement.

"This is one of them grown-man swing songs," Mason joked. "When I was growing up, everybody used to say that I had an old soul, so it's a nod to that. But it's a sweet song, with a very sweet melody, and I just wanted that melody to be ingrained in people."

It's on "Lullaby," however — the only ballad on the album — that Mason's melody-writing reaches an emotional apex. Rueful and poignant, the tune benefits from occasional twists, dynamic escalation and well-timed modulation.

"That was a tune inspired by my grandmother, by her presence. She was soft-spoken, but very firm — truly a Southern grandmother in a small town. She would bake muffins and cupcakes, and I can just smell them," he recalled. "I wanted that tune to have that warmth. And I wanted to feel in the present moment with it, as if we can breathe in the melody. It's just melody, so it was one of the hardest tunes to record. We really had to be present."

Beyond his penchant for elegant melodicism, Mason also appreciates the more complex harmonic visions of the mid-century jazz masters, as on "One United," admittedly the most standard-sounding tune on the record.

"There's a lot of inspiration from Miles Davis and the 1950s era of jazz there," he said of the bop-infused track. "It's one of those tunes where you can snap your fingers along, and it's the only song where everybody solos."

By "everybody," Mason refers to his gifted quintet with trumpeter Tony Glausi, tenor saxophonist Chris Lewis, bassist Felix Moseholm and drummer Domo Branch. With this group in mind, as arranger, Mason opened the roadmap for improvisational expression on most of the album's tunes. And as a leader, he decisively established the quintet's virtuosic abilities — and its unerring cohesion — from the album's outset. Within the first few seconds of the opener, "Final Voyage," the listener takes in Mason's rollicking hook, the crisp accents of the rhythm section and the murmuration of the horns.

This band configuration is one way — but not the only way — in which Mason recalls Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage," his own title a playful allusion to the original masterpiece.

Even with Mason's many informed allusions and references, however, some of his compositions are purely self-referential. Take "SilkyM," an unsparingly upbeat, funk-laden tune that takes its name from Mason's childhood moniker.

"Everybody thought I was smooth when I was growing up, so they called me 'silky,'" Mason admitted good-naturedly. "I wanted this song to be danceable, where we're having a good time. And the form is just the blues, because we can't go wrong with the blues."

On another eponymous track — "Sean's Theme," Mason's usual closer in live performance — the composer elevates a seemingly tossed off walking bass line into a full-blown musical statement. "There's no form to it, just one line and that's the whole song," Mason said. "It's just one of those fun songs to end it with." This said, it's the album's penultimate track, "Closure," that reveals Mason at his most integrated — and most definitive.

"'Closure' is the culmination of a lot of influences," he said. "It's jazz, classical and gospel all at the same time. It's the polyphony of New Orleans music, but also of Bach and baroque music. The lines have a bebop feel. And the inner harmonies and voice leadings are straight from the Black gospel church."

Taken together, Mason says, these influences generate a "spirit of celebration" — a phrase that recurs throughout the discussion of his music. It's something that he takes from his tradition, but something, too, that he offers in return.

—Suzanne Lorge

MAX BARRETT

"We're trying ... to be true to his intention, but give it space to breathe in today's world," Lara Downes says about her and Edmar Colon's reimagining of Gershwin's classic piece.

Lara Downes: Not Your Daddy's *Rhapsody In Blue*

WHAT SINGLE CLASSICAL WORK HAS PER-meated our lives more deeply than George Gershwin's (and orchestrator Ferde Grofe's) *Rhapsody In Blue*? The likely answer is none.

Commissioned by Paul Whiteman and written 100 years ago, it defined the Jazz Age, captured its zeitgeist, but never became captive to its cliches. It's been everywhere, done everything, won everybody. My father even took me to see Whiteman himself conduct it in 1958. It's been reinterpreted, reimagined, reinvented. There isn't one *Rhapsody In Blue* anymore. There are many.

The Tom Lord Jazz Discography currently lists 194 recordings of the piece by the likes of Harry James, Eddie South, Benny Goodman, Wild Bill Davison, Art Blakey, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton, Teddy Wilson, Dick Hyman, Deodato and Sun Ra. That barely scratches the surface. It doesn't include the two original recordings made in 1924 and 1927 by Gershwin himself. It was quoted in Bessie Smith's 1929 short film *St. Louis Blues*. Herbie Hancock has done it with Lang Lang. Leonard Bernstein put the stamp of the New York Philharmonic upon it; Oscar Levant did the same with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Zubin Mehta's version became the overture to the movie *Manhattan*, Woody Allen's love letter to contemporary New York. And have you ever waited on the phone for a United Airlines agent?

So many *Rhapsody*s — more are on the way.

Among the millions who grew up with the piece, classical pianist and media personality Lara Downes, who was born in 1973, taught herself *Rhapsody In Blue* during her teens while studying in the cloistered music monasteries of Vienna. "American music was very much looked down upon in European circles when I was there," she recalls, "and the *Rhapsody* and Gershwin were not part of any serious canon. Only music that was very cerebral and modern had any respect."

It made *Rhapsody In Blue* seem all the more urgent when she returned the the U.S. But Downes would grow up seeing it in a very different context from that of its first 50 years. Its second half-century would be a period of increasing agitation in America. In a curious way, the early history of *Rhapsody In Blue* converged with her personal activism and family history. The result is a modern reimagining of the work from Downes and Puerto Rican composer and orchestrator Edmar Colon — a 100th anniversary gift sent to the 20th century from the 21st.

It's not your daddy's *Rhapsody In Blue*. You hear the essential signposts of Grofe's original orchestration, but you will also hear unexpected interpolations and extensions. You will also hear the main outlines of Gershwin's piano parts, but with an interpretative latitude that seems fresh.

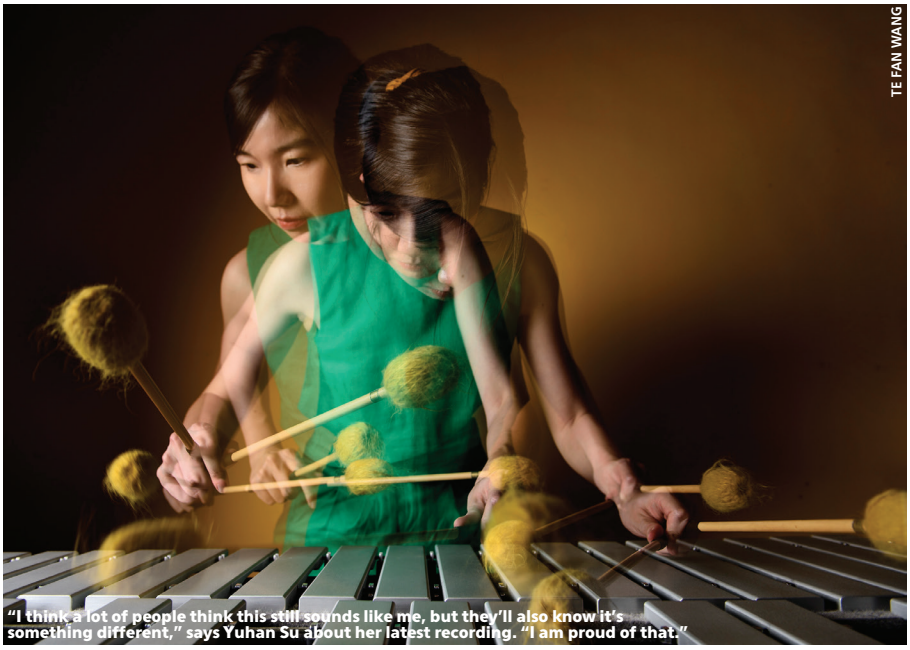
"It's important to me that Gershwin, in his original piano version of the piece, and Grofe in his subsequent orchestration, were trying to capture the America of 1924," Downes said. "But looking at the score today, we see it in the context of a very different America, 100 years later. Gershwin's inspiration was to celebrate what he called the 'musical kaleidoscope of America' — the melting pot. That vision was that central thing for me, and that's where my idea was born. What is that kaleidoscope of America in 2024? The reality of the melting pot is so different now. We're trying to give back to him what he started in the first place — to be true to his intention, but give it space to breathe in today's world."

Downes further explains its historical and social context: "Gershwin was intentionally inspired by our American diversity. Yet, just three months after its premier in February the Johnson-Reed Act was passed that was this incredibly restrictive immigration law aimed at Eastern Europe, Asia and other areas. So the *Rhapsody* debuts in a country where there are these forces at work that are negating its essential message. I hadn't known that, and so it took on a very different and celebratory meaning."

In reimagining *Rhapsody In Blue*, Downes and Colon have maintained and extended its metaphorical expression of freedom and diversity by adding other cultural colors: Caribbean percussion, several soprano saxophone interludes and, most unexpectedly, in a version performed for San Francisco audiences, an Asian chamber ensemble.

Downes' *Rhapsody In Blue* is not merely diverse. It's flexible. "The piece is site specific," she explains. "The performance where you hear the Chinese ensemble premiered in San Francisco, where that history of immigration is so essential to that region. When we travel the piece and it goes to Austin, it will have a totally different formation in that section of the piece. In Boston it will reflect local issues and history there.

"The reason this anniversary feels important to me comes down to a question," she reflects. "Does a piece go into a museum? Maybe. But *Rhapsody In Blue* isn't asking for that. It's asking for interpretation and looseness. It originally came together in a matter of weeks and was an experiment. So I don't think we should lock it down and let it collect dust." —*John McDonough*


TE FAN WANG

"I think a lot of people think this still sounds like me, but they'll also know it's something different," says Yuhan Su about her latest recording. "I am proud of that."

Yuhan Su's Liberation Suite

IN 2019, TAIWAN-BORN VIBRAPHONIST Yuhan Su needed a break from New York City.

Born in the small, rural city of Miaoli, Taiwan, Su first moved to the United States to study jazz at Berklee College of Music in 2008, after earning her master's degree in classical percussion in Tai Pei. Su first moved to New York in 2011, after graduating Berklee with a degree in jazz vibraphone performance.

For years now, Su has had a self-described good life in Brooklyn, where she lives close to Bar Bayeux, a cozy spot with live jazz and a hangout for musicians in the neighborhood. Still, she finds she often needs time away from the city to slow down and create.

"It never stops [here], you always have to [be at] your full speed," Su said. "[There are] a lot of inspiring people here, they're always doing something. So, you [are] kind of in this loop, which I think is great. You're always seeing something new, something that inspires you, but after a while, you know, you need a break."

Fortunately, she was accepted to participate in the Cité Internationale des Arts residency in Paris in 2019. The six-month assignment allowed Su to immerse herself in her music as well as the culture of Paris, and led to *Liberated Gesture* (see review on page 95), her most recent release on Sunnyside.

"[The residency was] almost surreal, like you basically don't need to worry about anything. I just focused on creating," Su noted. "And I visited a lot of [art] exhibitions and [saw] performances."

At the time, the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art was showcasing a retrospective of work by Hans Hartung, a German-French painter known for his striking, abstract style. Su found the exhibit "thrilling." She loved his bold, dramatic style and how she was able to see how his style evolved over his lifetime.

"It [was] a great reminder, for myself at the time, to trust the process of creating," said Su. "Sometimes you question yourself and your work a little bit. You feel like 'Is this good or bad?' But it's a process; you write something and then that can lead to something else."

Shortly after visiting that exhibit, she wrote a suite of compositions that would become the first three finished songs for *Liberated Gesture*: the spacious, minimal "Liberated Gesture II–Arc"; the percussive, energetic "Liberated Gesture III–Tightrope Walk"; and "Liberated Gesture IV–Hartung's Light," which blends the qualities of the two previous parts.

Sonically interpreting other art forms, particularly visual art and literature, is something Su said is exciting, and something she strived to do more of on *Liberated Gesture*. Along with drawing inspiration from Hartung, She wrote the frenetic "Hassan's Fashion Magazine" after attending a photography exhibit in Paris that explored traditional Moroccan fashion, and "Didion" after reading Joan Didion's *The Year Of Magical Thinking*, which chronicles how the author dealt with the deaths of her husband and daughter.

"She's so honest and brave to just talk about that, and it [inspired] very strong expression [in] me," said Su. "I feel [that] all art works, they kind of they express some kind of energy, or power, and then we receive and we interpret that in different ways, right? So, we have our version and then I can also [change] that into something else. This kind of transformation — that's what I like."

Su also intentionally expanded her improvisational palette and leaned into the avant-garde on this record. She describes her previous records, including her last record on Sunnyside, as modern jazz in a purer sense, informed by a more traditional jazz language: extended harmonies, approach tones and scales. That sound is still present on *Liberated Gesture*, but this project also highlights Su stretching herself using polyrhythm, atonalism and melodic elements like intervals, shapes and sounds.

According to Su, this language felt more conducive to the overarching concept she was going for on *Liberated Gesture*: "I wanted to find the freedom within the given limitations. For example, there are different mixed meters, there are some atonal harmonies, and then different elements in the compositions. So, then, how you [create with] maximum freedom [and] fly through?"

Su's goal was to learn how to flow through a complex composition without feeling limited in expression, and the bandmembers she chose for the record helped her learn how to do that.

Particularly, she chose pianist Matt Mitchell as well as drummer Dan Weiss. Mitchell and Weiss are mainstays in the New York avant-garde jazz scene and musicians she'd long admired.

"They are like my idols," said Su. "I was always a big fan, and I went to their shows. I invited them to play a show with me. And I was just so shocked while I was actually playing. The way they play, it's so flexible, and so the music really flows while they are playing super-difficult things so precisely."

Liberated Gesture also features Su's long-time friend, eclectic bassist Marty Kenney, as well as flutist/alto saxophonist/composer Caroline Davis, who also recites a poem written by Su on the track "She Goes Into A Silent War." Su wrote the subversive poem for women who are brave enough to step outside of what's culturally expected of them.

Four years since putting the piece together in her room by the Seine, *Liberated Gesture* is out and Su will begin touring through Europe, and playing a few dates in New York and Los Angeles, before the end of the year. The pandemic slowed the release process, so Su is relieved and elated to finally share this music that feels in step with where she is now and the direction she plans to explore in the future.

"I really made something different from my previous musical works," she said. "I think a lot of people think this still sounds like me, but they'll also know it's something different. I am proud of that." —*Alexa Peters*

DANI BARBIERI

"I love the idea of articulating our dreams and wishes and in a way 'shouting' them in our mind — the same way the great Dizzy Gillespie talks about hearing the melodies loudly," says guitarist Rotem Sivan.

Rotem Sivan Dreams Out Loud

ROTEM SIVAN, THE ISRAELI-BORN GUITARist who has established himself as a strong new voice after moving to New York in 2008, is, by now, an artist to be reckoned with in the crowded modern jazz guitar scene. He possesses prodigious technique and talent, fortified by a sense of adventure and heady sophistication — but also savors a moving melody and an infectious groove. A decade after his debut album, *Enchanted Sun* (Steeplechase), Sivan returns with his eighth and possibly richest record to date, *Dream Louder*, attesting to the boldness of his voice and musical mission.

Sivan took an important and perhaps inevitable journey in moving to New York to study at The New School. It was a natural landing spot in his formative years. "We learn from our environment and colleagues," he says, "so being in this city and exposed to so much creation in every spectrum was, and still is, huge for me. Getting your ass kicked at sessions, jams and recording always pushed me forward. This city is wild, but I do feel it's a very strong catalyst for creation."

As a notable current leg of his own ongoing musical journey, Sivan's *Dream Louder* is a calling card. At root, it is an album featuring his empathetic trio, joined by bassist Hamish Smith and drummer Miguel Russell, but with the surprisingly seamless textural cameos of vocalizing and whistling expanding the guitar trio palette.

Speaking of his guiding concept for the album, Sivan said, "I love the idea of articulating our dreams and wishes and in a way 'shouting' them in our mind — the same way the great Dizzy Gillespie talks about hearing the melodies loudly. The album is dealing with people and taking inspiration from a few musical veins including folk, metal, Indian and Appalachian.

"I really like sounds and enjoy finding truthful expressions of intentions in many art genres — and also in food, to be honest. I see the idea of intention as love, in that sense when an artist really means something and gives his/her attention — love — there's true magic, when we're talking about the making of an espresso, a croissant or a jazz trio album."

Dream Louder boasts several of Sivan's diverse original tunes, but also takes some creative turns in the cover tune cause, giving new flavors to The Beatles' "Blackbird," Kurt Weill's "Mack The Knife" (in an lazy, loping "Poinciana"-esque feel) and a new take on Jean Ritchie's classic American folk tune "West Virginia Mine Disaster."

As he explains, the concept for that folkloric journey started with a visit to "a dusty attic at my wife's parents' [home]. I was sifting through some gems from her grandfather's vinyl collection and stumbled upon some cool Appalachian sounds that made me go deeper into that world and wrote this arrangement for 'West Virginia Mine Disaster.' The songs were written with a person in mind and it's [a process of] calling for all of us to seize our dreams and go for it. The songs were all an interesting dialogue between the image and the sound while I was imagining and trying to find the person's true song."

In general, Sivan is aware of and thankful for the special chemistry that exists within the trio. "Making music is a very personal process where I want to feel at home but also challenged," he says. "Having great people, friends and truly wild musicians to make music with is a blessing. At rehearsal I showed Miguel a groove in 11 on top of the main groove in 4 (over 'Magis'). He said it's really hard, then after 35 seconds he played it flawlessly."

As for the refreshing touches of vocals (from his vocal teacher Sami Stevens) and whistling (a cellist comrade, Luke Krafka), Sivan explains that "the sounds of folklore music where the human vocal sounds — whistling and voice — are an element is a magical sound to me, one that holds a lot of expression. I feel there's a lot of space to explore those sounds in an instrumental landscape as well. I was trying to find the silver lining between the trio and the vocal cords throughout the album."

Apart from the various conceptual frameworks and afterthoughts represented by the album, the centerstage expressive force comes from Sivan's guitar work, mostly in clean-toned, limber and tastefully phrased modes. Tucked into his playing are subtle hints of Israeli musical harmonies and ornamentations. Sivan's playing can be reminiscent of Pat Metheny's guitaristic voice, along with echoes of such serpentine-linear guitar legends as the late Pat Martino and Peter Bernstein — both of whom have sung Sivan's praises.

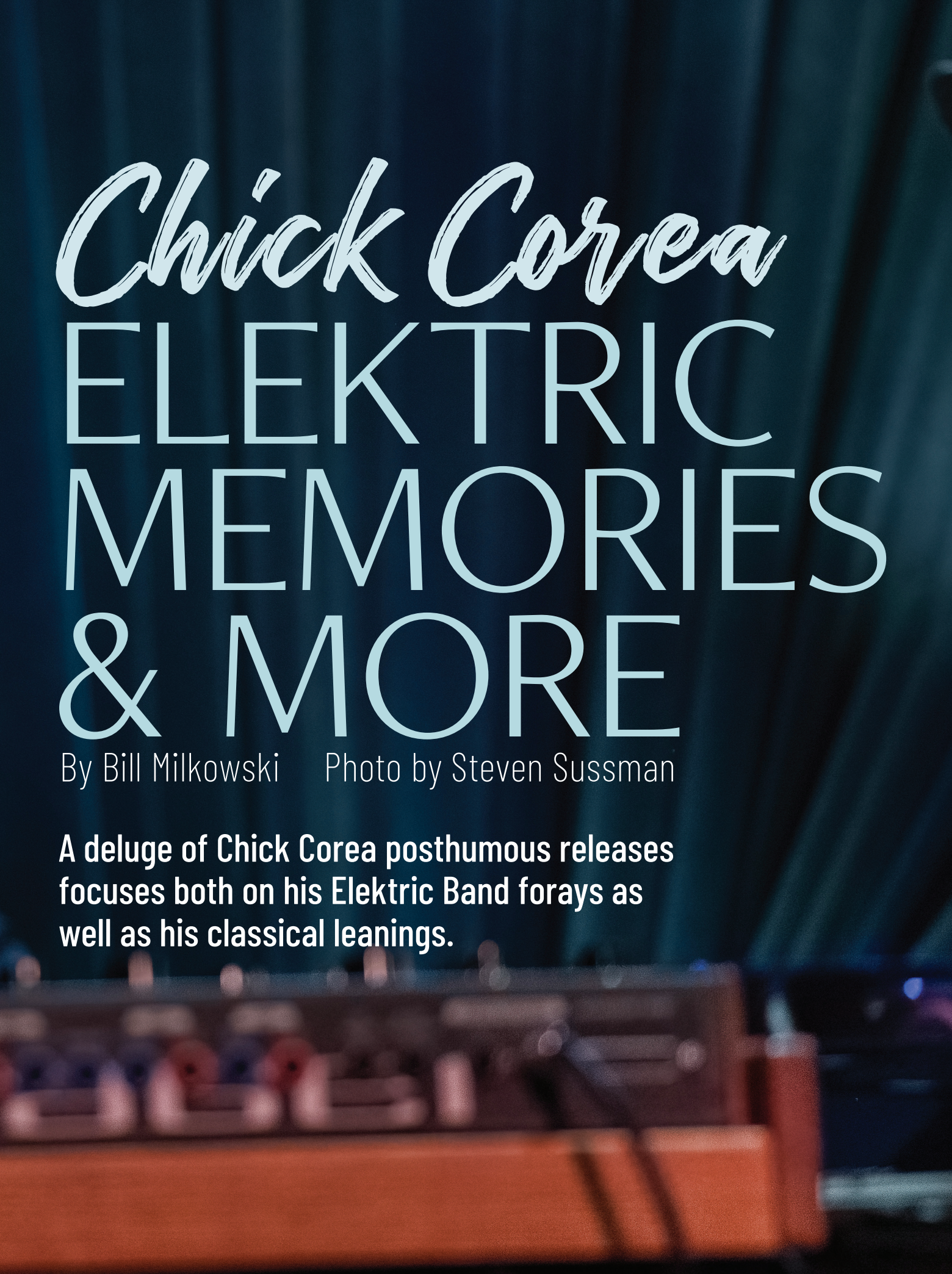
Citing a short list of guitar-playing heroes including Wes Montgomery, Pat Metheny, John McLaughlin, Kenny Burrell and many more, Sivan admits, "I do love guitar, that's for sure. I also am a big fan of piano music and look up to the classical masters like Glenn Gould, Vladimir Horowitz and more recently Daniil Trifonov, as well as many jazz masters we all know well."

Dream Louder takes its place in what is clearly a continuum of creative canvases for Sivan, with more to come. In short, the album format helps to define his journey: "I see making albums as sort of a snapshot of reality and how I see, feel and experience things at a certain time. The idea that we can frame that moment and stop time that way is very special, and I care for it very much." —*Josef Woodard*

Chick Corea ELEKTRIC MEMORIES & MORE

By Bill Milkowski Photo by Steven Sussman

A deluge of Chick Corea posthumous releases focuses both on his Elektric Band forays as well as his classical leanings.



COURTESY CANDID RECORDS

The classic late-'80s Elektric Band lineup, from left, Frank Gambale, Dave Weckl, Corea, John Patitucci and Eric Marienthal.

If Armando Anthony "Chick" Corea had done nothing more that what he produced during the 1970s, he would still be a solid candidate for both the Mount Rushmore and Mount Olympus of jazz. The sheer abundance of creative expression jammed into that 10-year span — groundbreaking work with Miles Davis, Circle and Return to Forever, duets with Herbie Hancock and Gary Burton, appearing on recordings by Stan Getz, John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell, Al Di Meola, Joe Farrell, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, Stanley Clarke — is simply staggering.

But Corea never stopped creating. His output through the '80s and '90s was equally prolific and included recordings and tours with the Elektric Band, his Akoustic Band, Elektric Band II, his Three Quartets group with Michael Brecker, Eddie Gomez and Steve Gadd, his Trio Music group with bassist Miroslav Vitous and drummer Roy Haynes and his Remembering Bud Powell band with Joshua Redman, Kenny Garrett, Wallace Roney, Christian McBride and Roy Haynes, along with more encounters with Gary Burton and collaborations with Bobby McFerrin.

In this century, Corea toured in 2008 as a member of the cooperative Five Peace Band with McLaughlin, Garrett, McBride and Vinnie Colaiuta (releasing their self-titled album in 2009). That same year he participated in a Return To Forever reunion tour with Di Meola, Clark and White (after a hiatus of 32 years) that yielded the live 2009 album *Returns*. He would also tour and record with banjo virtuoso Bela Fleck (2007's *The Enchantment*, 2015's *Two*), drummer Steve Gadd (2017's *Chinese Butterfly*), his Spanish Heart Band (2019's *Antidote*) and Acoustic Band (2019's *Live*).

During his six-decade career, Corea won 27 Grammys (four awarded posthumously) and was nominated 72 times. And now, nearly three years after his passing on Feb. 9, 2021, there's been a deluge of Corea music in recent months, courtesy of Candid Records, including a couple of previously unreleased live recordings.

First to drop was *Chick Corea Elektric Band: The Complete Studio Recordings 1986–1991*. Made available on streaming services over the summer, it was released as a limited-edition, five-LP box set in December. This hefty package contains 1986's *The Chick Corea Elektric Band*, 1987's *Light Years*, 1988's *Eye Of The Beholder*, 1990's *Inside Out* and 1991's *Beneath The Mask*, all originally released on the GRP label.

Following his tenure with Return To Forever during the analog '70s, the Chick Corea Elektric Band ushered in a brave new world of digital keyboard technology with its imaginative use of new Yamaha MIDI gear that had begun flooding the market in 1984. A longtime gadget geek, Corea would continue following the latest innovations in synth technology on subsequent Elektric Band outings, upping the ante from album to album with new gear from Korg, Kurzweil and Roland. "It's always been part of my interest," he told this writer in a 2019 interview. "A new instrument comes out and I'm intrigued. And once I take the time to delve into that direction, it becomes a commitment."

Those state-of-the-art toys were put to the test on "Rumble," a dynamic duel between Corea and drummer Dave Weckl, as well as on the mondo synth showcase "No Zone." Another highlight of that first Elektric Band album was the chops-busting trio number "Got A Match?" An epic post-bop burner, the tune is defined by Weckl's swinging groove, Patitucci's unerring uptempo walking bass lines and the tightly executed unison lines on the dizzying head between Chick's Minimoog synth lines and Patitucci's incredibly facile electric bass lines. Both Corea and Patitucci turn in spectacular solos on this adrenalized romp, with the bassist quoting John Coltrane's "Mr. P.C." along the way. Corea and Weckl also engage in some rapid-fire exchanges midway through this show-stopping number, which would become an Elektric Band concert staple for years to come.

For the Elektric Band's sophomore outing, *Light Years*, Corea recruited not one but two new players in Aussie guitarist Frank Gambale and saxophonist Eric Marienthal, both based in Los Angeles at the time. Gambale had been keyed into Corea's music since the age of 13, when he first heard Return To Forever's *Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy*. "That literally blew my mind," he recalled. "But it was Chick I was listening to. I mean, he just captured my heart from the first time I heard him, and I was trying to transcribe all of his crazy, amazing solos."

The young guitarist had moved from his hometown of Canberra to Los Angeles in 1982 to study at the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT). Four years later, through his own chutzpah and guile, Gambale got an audition for a spot in the Elektric Band. "I happened to be at Mad Hatter studio doing a session and I chatted up Evelyn Brechtlein (studio manager and personal assistant to Corea's personal manager, Ron Moss). So I gave her my card and she said, 'I've heard of you. My husband (drummer Tom Brechtlein) has played with you.' Six months later, I got called to do an audition."

He ended up winning a spot in the Elektric Band after performing a scorched-earth rendition of "Got A Match?" at a sink-or-swim audition with Corea on keys and Brechtlein (who had played on Chick's *Secret Agent* and *Tap Step*) on drums. Gambale joined the Elektric Band on tour in October of 1986 and did a tour of 30 U.S. cities that fall. Following a winter break, they all assembled at Mad Hatter Studios in early 1987 to record *Light Years*.

The Elektric Band's more heavily produced sophomore outing contains several sequence-driven tracks — Corea's bid to appeal to a wider audience with a brand of music that was funkier and eminently more communicative than the more complex music on *The Chick Corea Elektric Band*. "The way that we approached that record was almost with a pop mentality," said Weckl, who was given an associate production credit on *Light Years*. "On the title track, for instance, I recorded the drums separately. I played the kick, snare and hi-hat first, and then I overdubbed the toms."

But that experiment would prove fleeting. "From then on out, Chick wanted to make sure that we played everything live," said Marienthal.

Eye Of The Beholder was the perfect antidote. This third Elektric Band album reflects a tightening of the ensemble playing and a greater showcasing of the individual virtuosity of these consummate musicians. And Corea lets

them rip in no uncertain terms on "Cascade, Part II," "Trance Dance" and the dynamic title track. The Spanish-tinged "Eternal Child' harkens back to Corea's 1976 album *My Spanish Heart* and features brilliant solos by Corea, Gambale and Marienthal, with synths providing orchestral seasoning rather than fronting as a solo voice. Piano also figures prominently on the catchy groove number "Passage," featuring some saxophone heroics by Marienthal, as well as on the suite-like "Beauty," which is comparable to the title track of RTF's 1975 Grammy-winning album *No Mystery*. *Eye Of The Beholder* concludes on a visceral note with the blazing, quintessential fusion showcase "Amnesia," essentially an electrified bebop romp that turns Gambale loose to shred in unfettered fashion and has Corea channeling his inner Bud Powell.

Taking it *Inside Out*

Corea explored a similar tack on the Elektric Band's fourth outing, *Inside Out*. Again writing to the band's individual strengths, in classic Ellingtonian fashion, he highlights them on pieces like the driving, Latin-tinged swinger "Make A Wish, Part 2," the intricate stop-time vehicle "Kicker" and the epic four-part suite "Tales Of Daring," which rivals the grandiosity of Corea's "Duel Of The Jester And The Tyrant" suite from Return To Forever's *Romantic Warrior*. This is intelligent fusion with a capital "F," but without forsaking the "M" word — melody.

"For Chick, it was never a soloist versus band thing, it's a constant communication with everyone in the band," said Marienthal. "It was always a conversation, and Chick was always listening."

"That was Chick's feeling about making music, that it was a dialogue," added Weckl. "He liked that sense of being there in that moment … where it's that moment and it'll never happen again. He thrived on that communication and the dialogue and the interaction, and just the joy of making music."

The fifth Elektric Band album is the aggressively fuzoid offering *Beneath The Mask*, where Corea's arsenal of keyboards — Kurzweil, Synclavier, Minimoog, Korg Waveframe, Roland Super Jupiter D-550, Prophet VS, MIDI Rhodes, Yamaha KX5 and Yamaha SY-99 synthesizers — dominate the conversation. Marking a return to the more commercially viable jazz-funk of the Elektric Band's second outing, *Light Years*, it also marks the end of the first stage of the Chick Corea Elektric Band. Chick would field an entirely new lineup, which he christened the Chick Corea Elektric Band II, for 1993's *Paint The World* (scheduled for a spring reissue on Candid).

Less thematic than Corea's more auteur undertakings like *Eye Of The Beholder* and *Inside Out*, *Beneath The Mask* finds the five virtuoso musicians engaging in a highly sophisticated-yet-accessible set of music while soloing without inhibition. Corea shared composer credits with Patitucci and Weckl on six of the 10 tracks, which travel from heavy grooving funk-fusion ("Beneath The Mask," "Little Things That Count," "Jammin E. Cricket") to lively West African township jive ("One Of Us Is Forty") to mellow smooth jazz ("A Wave Goodbye," "Lifescape") to flirtations with a reggae one-drop feel ("Free Step"), salsa ("Illusions") and grandiose '70s-styled prog-rock/fusion ("Charged Particles").

Gambale's scintillating fretboard pyrotechnics throughout this offering hold fusion fans in awe. "Charged Particles," written by Corea specifically with Gambale's unique guitar gifts in mind, recalls some of the composer's more adventurous writing from his RTF days. A grinding, grandiose number that might fit nicely in the middle of sets by Deep Purple, Yes or King Crimson, it turns Gambale loose for mind-boggling feats of sweep-picking midway through the aggressive piece.

The longest track on *Beneath The Mask*, and easily the most challenging, is the closer, "Illusions." The driving collective muscle of the Elektric Band is put to the test on this suite-like number underscored by Patitucci's crisp

The debut release from a generational talent

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Backstage during the Elektric band's reunion tour in 2016.

arpeggiating and Weckl's polyrhythmic thunder. And it features the usual burst of exacting unison passages and dizzying exchanges of eights between Fender Rhodes, soprano sax and guitar. "The Elektric Band was the product of Chick's energy," noted Patitucci. "And every gig was a master class, if you paid attention."

A Futuristic Elektric Outing

While those seminal recordings encapsulate one era of the Elektric Band, *Chick Corea Elektric Band: The Future Is Now* documents another. A previously unreleased live album, *The Future Is Now* highlights performances from August 2016 to May 2018 during the group's reunion tour. Compiled by Corea before his passing in 2021, it rolled out early last November as a two-CD set and three-LP vinyl set. As stated in the album's packaging: "While we acknowledge the sadness of his passing, this album was not intended to be a posthumous tribute, but rather a joyous toast to the decades-spanning music of the Elektric Band in a triumphant live setting that Chick was so excited to bring to listeners. We hope you, too, may feel the music fires burning as bright as ever as you listen to *The Future Is Now* and experience it in the way Chick intended for it to be heard."

The album is marked by crackling performances of three tracks ("Alan Corday," "Jocelyn–The Commander" and "Johnny's Landing") from the Chick Corea Elektric Band's 2004 album *To The Stars* (inspired by Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's 1954 science fiction novel of the same name) along with classic Elektric Band fare like "Got A Match?," "Charged Particles" and "Trance Dance." They also deliver a scintillating version of Jimmy Heath's bop anthem "C.T.A." and a freewheeling "Ished" (both of which appear on the Elektric Band II's *Paint The World*).

The previously unheard *Sardinia: A Night Of Mozart & Gershwin* was released on Sept. 15, 2023, meeting the eligibility deadline to be considered for the 66th Grammy Awards on Feb. 4. (It was indeed nominated for Best Classical Compendium, a category created for the 2013 Grammy Awards). A collaboration with the Orchestra da Camera della Sardegna, under the direction of conductor Simone Pittau, this concert in Moldo, Sardinia, was the final stop on a European tour of solo performances that Corea played in November 2018.

Chick, the Classical Improviser

Sardinia documents Corea's distinctive approach to a classical program, adding a touch of playfulness to the proceedings while still upholding the integrity and reverence for the music. He takes great liberties with Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24, inserting improvisational flourishes, while adding personal touches throughout Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*. As Corea's longtime engineer Bernie Kirsh, who worked on every one of Corea's albums since 1978's *The Leprachaun*, noted: "Chick concluded that Gershwin was basically a jazz musician and that *Rhapsody In Blue* was definitely a jazz piece. And so he took that to heart in his interpretation here. He improvises on the cadenzas throughout the piece and he just wraps it all in a jazz mode. Then near the end of the piece he interjects a little bit of Gershwin's 'The Man I Love' before segueing back to the 'Rhapsody' theme. So he's intertwining the pop and so-called serious pieces into one, and even incorporates bits of stride piano playing and a whole Latin section near the end of the piece. It's what he does. He makes everything his own."

According to Kirsh, Corea thought of himself as a composer who played piano and didn't see a distinction between improvising something that was a piece of music and taking a pencil and writing it out on paper. "It was all the same creative process to him. That idea of 'just creating something' really defines Chick. And throughout his interpretation of *Rhapsody In Blue* you can really hear how much fun he's having by taking playful liberties with it. It was just his creative spirit in action … just Chick doing his fun stuff."

Project manager Jordin Pinkus added that Corea brought a casual vibe to the 1,500-seat concert hall that night in 2018.

"This was winter in Sardinia, and when we showed up to the hall, there was no heat," Pinkus said. "For the performance, Chick actually came out in a heavy-duty hoodie, and he had a heater right nearby to warm his hands up and a little wastebasket by the piano to put tissues after blowing his nose in between pieces. This all added to the air of informality that Chick was trying to create for this concert. His concept of what a classical performance should be was very different from what a traditional conception of that might be, where there's a particular sequence of how everybody goes out on stage in a certain order and everybody has to be dressed in black.

"And right from the get-go, Chick wanted it known that he didn't want to do any of that," Pinkus continued. "His concept was more like these were all musicians on a stage and it's like a jazz band. Chick punctured the seriousness of the event, which relaxed the audience and allowed his natural playfulness to come through, which you hear particularly in the Gershwin piece."

Paint it Elektric

As mentioned, this spring will also see the reissue of 1993's *Paint The World* by Elektric Band II, featuring a brand new lineup of guitarist Mike Miller, bassist Jimmy Earl and drummer Gary Novak with saxophonist Marienthal the lone holdover from the first incarnation. Recorded at Mad Hatter Studios in Los Angeles and consisting primarily of first takes, *Paint The World* is marked by the usual proficiency, spontaneity, impeccable execution of ultra-challenging unison lines and jaw-dropping displays of chops that had characterized Corea's previous five Elektric Band albums. And with Novak's powerful and highly interactive approach to the kit, Earl's deeply grooving six-string electric bass lines laying a solid foundation, Miller scorching the fretboard with an uncanny legato approach to the guitar and Marienthal blowing forcefully and lyrically from track to track, the results are thrilling. Corea leads his remarkably flexible Elektric Band II through an eclectic collection of originals ranging from urgent funk to shuffle blues, searing fusion, uptempo swing, flamenco-tinged suite, infectious Afro-Caribbean grooves and ambient soundscapes.

Much of *Paint The World* is defined by the warmer, more inviting sounds of Corea's Yamaha S-CF III Concert Grand Piano and Fender Rhodes electric piano. "The overall

idea for the album was 'a little more piano and Rhodes, a little less stage volume,' so we could use the piano a bit more," said drummer Novak, a Chicago native and longtime Los Angeles resident. "So Chick requested me to play an 18-inch bass drum and try to mix a bit of a jazz sound with a modern fusion edge on this recording. That was the only direction given."

Guitarist Miller, a chopsmeister of the highest order, alternates between showcasing his shredding aesthetic on electric ("Space," the suite-like "Ritual" and a re-imagining of Jimmy Heath's oft-covered bop staple "C.T.A.") with a warmer, more lyrical approach on a Gibson Chet Atkins nylon-string acoustic (on "Paint The World" and "Tone Poem"). As he said, "I found myself sometimes being the non-jazz foil, trying to bring in that rock flavor to the band sound rather than the vocabulary of what a jazz approach would be. And I do believe that I'm the only guy who ever played Chuck Berry licks with Chick (on 'Blue Miles'). I just had to sneak them in."

On other tunes like "Paint The World," the buoyant "Tumba Island" and the meditative "Spanish Sketch," saxophonist Marienthal soars on soprano (an instrument he had introduced as his main voice on *Beneath The Mask*), while his alto solos on "Ritual" and "Ished" (short for "diminished") reach Breckerian levels of intensity.

"One of the many great things about the Elektric Band was that Chick always encouraged us to 'go for it' in our solos," said Marienthal. "The more we stretched and experimented, the more he liked it. It was all about how we expressed ourselves individually while at the same time communicating as a group. Solos in the band weren't really 'solos,' per se; it was more like one of us would lead the conversation while always listening to what the others had to say. That's what kept the music so fresh night after night. It was always wide open and different every time we played it live."

Elektric Band II guitarist Miller stood in awe of Corea's musicianship. "There was maybe a handful of players with the kind of power that Chick had at his disposal," he said. "One of the scariest things ever for me was to be playing live and you look and suddenly here comes that guy with a keyboard around his neck … and he wants to trade fours! It was like being Mike Tyson's sparring partner. And yet, in spite of his obvious virtuosity, one of the things that impressed me the most was the restraint he would use. Sure, he could flatten you one night, but the next night he would play super melodic, like Ravel. He was that comfortable in any kind of music."

"With each new project, Chick was always changing, constantly creating," said bassist Earl. "He encouraged his musicians to reach new heights not only individually but as an ensemble as well. He was also a super-fun person to be on the road with, always supportive. I'm very grateful to have known him and to have played with him."

Added drummer Novak, who was 23 at the time he recorded *Paint The World*, "Chick was such a prolific composer as well as a master improviser, but the goal with him was to be wide open and enjoy the playfulness. His freedom to hit the stage with zero composed music was incredible to me. Not only was he an American icon and jazz legend, but also the kindest leader, supportive artist and friend. I can't explain the gratitude I have for my time in his band."

The venerated maestro, 27-time Grammy winner and National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master and DownBeat Hall of Famer tapped into a rainbow of musical expression throughout his remarkably productive career. And he did it all with unbound joy.

"You don't have to be Picasso or Rembrandt to create something," Corea once famously said. "The fun of it, the joy of creating, is way high above anything else to do with the art form." **DB**

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GREG OSBY
FROM THE ABYSS
to *MINIMALISM*

By Ted Panken Photo by Eddy Westveer

At the beginning of November, Greg Osby flew to Italy for a week of duo concerts with pianist Michele Franzini, his partner on *Choices*, a lyric recital on Osby's Inner Circle imprint. Between concerts, the 63-year-old alto saxophonist boarded at Franzini's bed-and-breakfast in rural Tuscany, enjoying the restorative silence, communing with the "olive trees, grape vines and big sky." He also spent quality time rehearsing in Casa Franzini's large performance space-kitchen where his host prepared an "amazing fish with capers, potatoes and olives" accompanied by a locavore vino bianco for Osby's final evening meal.

After dinner, Osby spoke with DownBeat via Zoom about *Minimalism*, released on Inner Circle. The new album comes out 15 years after his last leader date, *Nine Levels* — quite a stretch between recordings.

"It was an involuntary hiatus," Osby said, citing "financial, entrepreneurial, conceptual, academic and pedagogical hurdles" toward documenting "ideas I'd been plotting for years in terms of concept and band theory."

He traced the particulars. In 2006, Blue Note dropped Osby, after issuing 16 leader or co-led dates since 1990. In short order, he started Inner Circle and, "burned out" from 25 years of touring, accepted "a good offer with a lot of perks" at Berklee College of Music. After a while, the quotidian demands of teaching and overseeing his rapidly growing label (*Minimalism* is album No. 97 in the Inner Circle catalog) were moving Osby "off track."

"I wrote nothing during my four years at Berklee," he said. "I didn't want to endanger my reputation by putting out something solely reflective of music I had previously released. Afterwards, I studied and wrote again, but the music was like the proverbial tree falling in the forest that no one hears. My idea of how I should sound radically changed. Rather than flurries of content or technical wizardry, I was trying to be more detailed and basically self-edit. I got more into how musical sonics affect people. I listened to players like Ben Webster and Wayne Shorter, two opposites, who spoke to me profoundly about saying a whole lot with less."

RI SUTHERLAND-COHEN

Osby, second from right, performing with the World Saxophone Quartet: from left, David Murray, Bruce Williams and James Carter

Materially, Osby was doing all right, cobbling together a career mosaic in which he primarily fulfilled the roles of collaborator, "hired gun" and sideman, led residencies and master classes, and served as artistic director of Poland's Sopot Jazz Festival. But as his old friend Steve Coleman put it, "Greg was treading water, just playing, going off his talent, but not really pushing his own music."

"Sinking" replaced "treading water" as the more operative metaphor after November 2017, when the Boston Globe included Osby in a piece about three teachers who had left Berklee quietly after female students accused them of sexual indiscretions. Immediately, he lost tours, gigs and endorsements. Friends kept their distance; so did artists he'd recorded for Inner Circle. Osby's income from music dropped precipitously, rock-bottoming at zero in the COVID year of 2020.

Osby had "saved every phone call, email, text message, video and photograph" from his accuser, whose identity he has not revealed. He filed a defamation lawsuit and was exonerated at an April 2021 hearing where the presiding judge, a woman, ordered the defendant — a no-show — to recant her statements and to pay Osby $146,000, plus interest, for lost earnings and attorney fees.

Osby made *Minimalism* in February 2018, at the beginning of this fallow period. "It contains the things I discuss with my students, what I study and read," Osby said. "Most music I like firmly details and outlines the era it was created in, through the juxtaposition of instruments, the arrangements, how people play, the way they embrace and address the material at hand. Other than some of the more hip-hop-laced, groove-based new jazz players, I don't know if I've heard much else — especially from people of my generation — that really details what today sounds like."

Agree or disagree with Osby's assessment, the statement summarizes the consistently iconoclastic modus operandi he's documented since 1987, when he recorded *Sound Theatre* (JMT) with a band including pianist Michelle Rosewoman, bassist Lonnie Plaxico and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, who was then 22. *Mindgames*, from 1988, featured Geri Allen ("a heavy influence") and Edward Simon on keyboards. In 1989, Simon paired off with Renee Rosnes on *Season Of Renewal* (featuring Cassandra Wilson and Amina Claudine Myers on vocals), as he did with Michael Cain on *Man-Talk For Moderns*, Osby's Blue Note debut.

"Greg encouraged me to move to New York and was the first to record me," Simon said to this reporter back in 2002. Then an 18-year-old conservatory student in Philadelphia, he caught Osby's attention on a guest soloist gig with bassist Charles Fambrough, with whom Simon was working regularly. "He always chooses the most unusual option, not to be opposite everyone else, but to challenge your traditional ideas and keep you from getting complacent."

Carrington, who developed a "like-family" relationship with Osby when both attended Berklee in the early '80s, observed: "Greg always sounded like himself; one note and you know it's him. You could hear he'd checked out Cannonball Adderley and Charlie Parker, and understood the alto saxophone tradition, but whatever he did would be original. He was searching for something new, as jazz musicians are supposed to."

"During those years, I investigated a lot of pianists," Osby said. "I tried to deepen my ability to play non-saxophonistic content and, at the same time, have an organized system exclusive to my playing and my music. Pianists play with two hands; there's 10 fingers and it's polyphonic — like two octopi. How do I compress that information into a monophonic instrument if I can only play one note at a time?"

Over the decades, Osby brought his idiosyncratic tonal personality to sideman recordings with left-of-mainstream iconoclasts like Jack DeJohnette, Andrew Hill, Jim Hall, Paul Motian, Mark Helias, Mike Formanek, Bobby Previte and Masabumi Kikuchi. He also landed undocumented but consequential runs with Herbie Hancock, Dizzy Gillespie, Jon Faddis, Muhal Richard Abrams, the World Saxophone Quartet, Saxophone Summit, Will Calhoun and the Grateful Dead as well as recording duos with Andrew Cyrille, John Abercrombie and Marc Copeland. On top of that, Osby co-led encounters with saxophonists Joe Lovano, Dave Liebman, Tikeme Postma, Gary Thomas and Steve Coleman. The latter two were Osby's colleagues in M-Base, the influential 1980s Brooklyn musicians' collective from which Allen, Wilson and Carrington also emerged.

"I want to project that M-Base was a deliberate collective," Osby said. "Everybody brought in ideas and compositions." He contends that his relationship with Coleman, strong again after a period of estrangement, has been misunderstood. "I actively sought him out, but it's been implied that I did that to find myself, as

though I was his understudy. We had a lot of common interests, threads that we could connect on, and we got together practically every day. He was at the top of the food chain in terms of enthusiasm and curiosity and determination to see things through, and that personality and energy is infectious. It gave me an emotional and aesthetic charge I didn't get from many people other than Gary Thomas. But that didn't make him our leader. I'm my own person. I have my own style, my own attitude, my own opinions about things. I'm not a follower."

He continued: "I dare say the way some younger players play, how they think about and approach music, and the settings they place themselves in wouldn't have happened if we hadn't done the M-Base experiments and recordings." Asked for specifics, he cited a litany of heady concepts.

"We dealt with loops before hip-hop and jazz were a thing. We set specific parameters by which to embrace and address a particular song — you play these intervals and these rhythms, within this range and within this register. We wrote drum chants that set a groove exclusive to that song. We wrote bass lines. We replaced traditional chord symbols and notation with what we term 'vertical structures,' which progress and resolve and follow a developed voice-leading series. We arrived at a system of tension-and-release-and-resolution, emphasizing weaker parts of the beat to impart a different bounce, implying other meters. People said, 'M-Base basically plays all odd meters,' even when it wasn't. We also dispensed with the term 'odd meters,' since 'odd' implies there's something wrong."

He's propagated these ideas within his various bands, showcasing an array of gifted post-Boomers — among them pianist Jason Moran, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, guitarist Nir Felder, bassist Matt Brewer, drummers Eric Harland, Rodney Green and Damion Reid and vocalist Sara Serpa — on an international stage.

"I like to find young cats, sometimes misfits, and put them in a fresh new band," Osby said. "I surround myself with young people who tell me who's hot, who's not, where to go. I regularly slither into clubs to catch some tunes. I want to know how people think, where they're receiving inspiration — the mortar that holds their conceptual bricks together."

'I LISTENED TO PLAYERS LIKE BEN WEBSTER AND WAYNE SHORTER, TWO OPPOSITES, WHO SPOKE TO ME PROFOUNDLY ABOUT SAYING A WHOLE LOT WITH LESS.'

He mirrored that career-long practice when assembling the international Gen-X cohort that plays on *Minimalism*. For the core session, recorded in Philadelphia, Osby convened a new quartet with Israeli pianist Tal Cohen, Philadelphia-born bassist Nimrod Speaks and Canadian drummer Adam Arruda. He sent the tracks to Portuguese accordionist João Barradas, who overdubbed on acoustic and MIDI iterations of the instrument. Barradas solos with saxophonistic clarity in Osby-influenced language on "Dedicato," and creates guitaristic, Moog-textured, contrapuntal lines on Becca Stevens' "I Forgive You."

Milan-based singer Alessandra Diodati's airy, delicately textured voice and spacious time feel illuminates both Stevens' lyric and her own revised text to Kendrick Scott's "Journey," originally sung by Gretchen Parlato (one of Osby's "top five") on Scott's *The Source*. Lithuanian singer Viktorija Pilatovic's precise enunciation, diction, attack and intonation fulfill the voice-as-instrument function on the metrically shifting title track and the mysterious "Once Known," for which overdubbed layers of her voice flow atop the chords.

"I always liked making a smaller ensemble sound larger," Osby said. "I like the sound of the female voice doubled and tripled paired with my saxophone, and the natural chorusing that occurs when you combine things that aren't perfectly in tune: chamber groups, string quartets, vocal quartets, chorales. I use the recording studio as a tool, not just a place to record. It's about how I can arrive at what I'm conceiving without sounding overly processed."

Barradas, a four-time leader on Inner Circle, has closely analyzed Osby's music since taking a master class with the Nine Levels band in 2007, when he was 15. *Minimalism*, he said, "shows a shift in Greg's composing — there's an amazing balance between the written material and the complex soloing that characterizes his playing." Along these lines, the players uphold Osby's abiding aesthetic, in Moran's words, "to put your foot in the fire and cause a bit of a ruckus in some songs to see what can happen." They also mirror what Cohen — who first played with Osby in 2009, in Perth, Australia, when he was 20 — described as the leader's "relaxed, cool" delivery of his gnarly constructions.

"Greg sent the music shortly before the recording," Cohen said. "Everything was written out — big chords, some with unplayable intervals. I didn't sleep, trying to make sense of it. But at the session, I played my own way, moved some notes and did what I needed to do. He gave me creative liberty."

"That approach is 100% from observing Jack DeJohnette when I was in his band," Osby said, recalling their 1985–1991 association. "He never unconditionally told cats to play something, or do more of this or that. If Jack liked something you did, he'd ask you to do it more frequently. Like Jack, I choose personnel for what they bring to the form, who can augment my aims as composer and bandleader and give life to these inanimate sequences and scribbles on the page. I bring fully written-out compositions, but once we're past that content, I want their personalities to emerge and flourish. That's why I write notation instead of chord symbols. What do you think that is? How do you interpret it? How do you get from this structure to that structure smoothly, effectively, as if you wrote it, not glued to the paper and afraid to make a mistake? Sometimes mistakes sound cool as hell."

Osby anticipated applying those principles during an imminent two-week tour with Hammond B-3 organist Arno Krijger and drummer-percussionist Florian Arbenz behind the 2023 release *Conversation #9* (Hammer). Before flying home, he'd spend a week in Poland, giving private lessons.

Throughout November, he'd booked meetings with various European agents "to get my band some momentum." "We'll see what materializes, but that's my priority," Osby said. "I have another record in the can, and I'm sitting on a pyramid of undocumented and unrecorded works. I have the bug to present myself in an array of my own contrivance again. We'll see how that runs. If I burn out, I'll make another hard left turn." **DB**

LARRY GOLDINGS

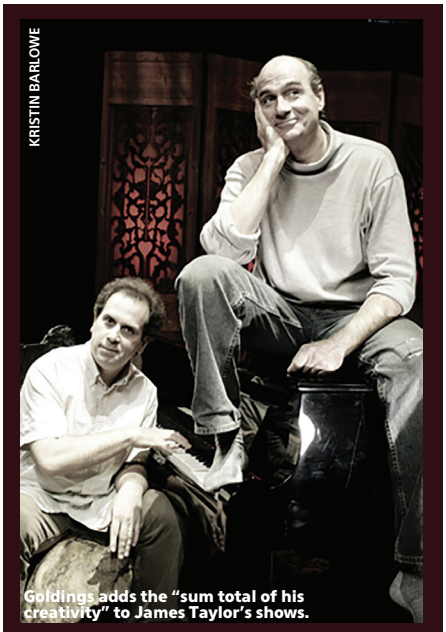
The Variety of Fun

By Allen Morrison
Photo by Mark Sheldon

Are you having any fun? Larry Goldings certainly is. Consider just two recent examples:

Scene 1: "If anyone had the blues, it was Beethoven," says a man with a blond Beatle wig and a pseudo-Austrian accent in a recent YouTube video. He is a character named Hans Groiner, Goldings' comic alter ego.

"Beethoven had the blues, and I like to bring it out." He spells out his "three B's: B.B. King, Bobby's Blues Band [his mangled pronunciation of the late bluesman Bobby 'Blue' Bland] and Beethoven." Goldings plays the role of Groiner seated at a Hammond B-3, then proceeds to play inappropriate, yet skillful, blues riffs over film clips of Leonard Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic performing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.


KRISTIN BARLOWE

Goldings adds the "sum total of his creativity" to James Taylor's shows.

JAMES TAYLOR ON LARRY GOLDINGS

In 2000, I was recording my last album for Sony records with Russ Titelman producing. I had just written my song "Mean Old Man" and Russ thought Larry would be the perfect piano, which he was. My longtime friend, collaborator and producer Don Grolnick, had died a few years previous, and meeting Larry has gone a long way to mitigating that loss, at least musically.

To the question, "What does he add to my albums and shows?" I just say he adds himself, the sum total of his creativity and musical personality. Larry is a dear friend and collaborator and working with him for the past 20 years has been an inestimable blessing.

"One Man Band" was the name of a tour and subsequent album/video that Larry and I did a dozen years ago. Larry was the "one man band." I think of that show as a small theater piece, which would not have been complete without Larry's half of the collaboration.

Of course, Larry has his own body of work, his own beautiful recordings of his own exquisite compositions. I wish that I could, in my shows with Larry, offer the audience more of his individual efforts. But I feel that way about so many of my band members, Mike Landau, Walt Fowler and Lou Marini, Steve Gadd, Jimmy Johnson, Luis Conté and Michito Sanchez, Andrea Zonn, Kate Markowitz and the fabulous Dorian Holley. That this ultimate group of musicians has been willing, over the years, to play my music with me is the single greatest gift, among so many.

The keyboard chair, in a band like ours, it's so central to the arrangement of any given tune, it's a responsibility. What Larry decides to play and, often just as important, not to play, is crucial. In my opinion, Larry is the greatest. I'm blessed to work with him. **DB**

IMRE BARTA

Peter Bernstein, Bill Stewart and Goldings, one of the longest-running organ trios in jazz.

Scene 2: In a casual, vertical iPhone video also posted on YouTube, Melinda Sullivan, an attractive young woman wearing a Hans Groiner T-shirt, black sweatpants and tap shoes, dances in the foreground as Goldings, poised behind her, plays his 1916 Steinway Model M with his right hand while laying down synth bass with his left. With impeccable time and an infectious groove, Goldings leads her into a blissful tap-and-keyboards rendition of Red Garland's classic arrangement of "Billy Boy." For the sheer joy of jazz, you can't beat it.

Goldings, 55, may be best known these days as the jazz organ master whose trio, Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart ("I know, we sound like a law firm," he commented at a recent sold-out gig at Sculler's in Boston) has been one of the leading organ-based groups in jazz almost since he started it more than 30 years ago with guitarist Peter Bernstein and drummer Bill Stewart.

But Goldings is also a versatile pianist, an A-list sideman, a devotee of all keyboard instruments (the weirder, the better, he says), a songwriter, a film and TV composer — for example, the Netflix series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* — and a bit of a comedian.

Goldings has an embarrassment of technique at his command, but his "wow" factor is his head for harmony, groove, storytelling and emotional depth. As a leader, he goes for subtle, cinematic effects that one does not always hear in jazz piano or organ. As a sideman, he is intuitive and supportive, leading to gigs with artists across genres, from jazz to pop to funk. His most high-profile gig comes as a member of James Taylor's band for the past two decades. He was also seen by millions as the sole sideman accompanying Taylor on JT's 2007 "One Man Band" tour and PBS special.

"There are many incredibly talented keyboard players in L.A., but really there is no one like him," said producer Larry Klein, who has employed him as a sideman in countless projects. "He's underappreciated by non-musicians, but by musicians he is certainly known to be a phenomenon. The first time I hired him, on Madeleine Peyroux's album *Careless Love* [Rounder, 2004], he just floored me. He has a combination of exceptional musical intuition, humor, a beautiful lyricism and versatility … . He always has a sense of where he needs to step out and make himself a noticeable musical element and where he should just slip into the landscape."

Fellow pianist Brad Mehldau cites him as an influence and refers to him as "a keyboard master," but added, in an email, "I hesitate because as soon as you say 'keyboard,' people think fusion!" Mehldau refers to his brilliance at "comping, his way of playing with others and giving strong support, not just through rhythmic clarity but through what I would call an arranging/orchestrational talent that is all his own. He can make a rhythm section sound like a big band. We know he does that on organ, but he also can do it on the piano." He already had that "mojo" in his early 20s, when Mehldau first encountered him at the New School jazz program.

Guitarist John Scofield, a frequent collaborator, said in an email, "When I first played

with Larry, I recognized a superior musical brain at work — so knowledgeable, plus he had soul! Hammond organ is a category unto itself, not just 'keyboards,' and Larry has gone deep. His musical resources are expansive; I doubt there are many styles that he can't play well."

The longtime partner Bernstein cites "his whole musicality, whatever the instrument. He has an incredible understanding of creative harmony based on voice-leading. If you swing, then you can swing with Larry."

Golding has played with everyone from Norah Jones to Scary Pockets, from Pat Metheny and Steve Gadd to John Mayer and Christina Aguilera — and, earlier in his career, from legendary guitarist Jim Hall to funk titan Maceo Parker. It's as much a reflection of his eclectic tastes as a tribute to his versatility.

"I remember one year I got off a Jim Hall tour to go onto a Maceo Parker tour," Goldings said recently via Zoom. "I loved that I was able to go from one to the other — two people at the forefront of their respective styles. To this day, my listening is incredibly diverse.

"I've learned that [jazz] is not always about harmony — it can be hard for jazz musicians to turn off that stuff — it's also about texture, mood, simplicity. Jazz musicians are convinced that harmonic knowledge and tech prowess are the only thing ... but I'm also a big Dylan fan, a big folk music fan."

That versatility keeps him in high demand as a leader, collaborator and sideman. His current projects include touring with the Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart organ trio, with a new album likely in 2024; a duo tour and recording with tap dancer Melinda Sullivan (see sidebar, page 34); duos with rising L.A. singer Dannielle De Andrea and singer/songwriter Jake Sherman; and an adventurous duo album titled *Chinwag* with under-the-radar trumpeter John Sneider. Goldings recorded the latter on an old upright instrument full of character; he also used a variety of other keyboards, including an 8-bit synth called a "Pocket Piano." The music, old and new, is cinematic, touching and occasionally weird, sometimes calling to mind the Italian composer and pianist Nino Rota.

He is also the namesake of the L.A.-based group "Scary Goldings" — a melding of Goldings' jazz organ with the online funk phenomenon Scary Pockets founded by guitarist Ryan Lerman and keyboardist (and Patreon founder) Jack Conte. The latter group, which has recorded a new video every week for more than six years, recently logged 1.1 million subscribers on YouTube and has issued more than 20 album compilations. Scary Goldings, augmented by Scofield on guitar, recently released a live album (*Scary Goldings Live featuring John Scofield* on Pockets Inc.), the group's fifth, and played ecstatic sets at festivals around the world.

When they get together, "Larry is just a fountain of melodic genius," Lerman said in an interview. "It's just about turning on the fountain."

A Comic Side Hustle

His wealth of musical projects aside, Goldings is also the foremost comedian in jazz. OK, that may not be saying much, given the scarcity of the competition, but his popularity says a lot.

His Hans Groiner character is well-documented in many satirical videos and, occasionally, in live shows where, among other topics, he demonstrates how to "improve" the compositions of Thelonious Monk. Groiner has so many international fans that Goldings worries the character may be getting more popular than the artist who portrays him.

Groiner's origins go back to the days of MySpace. "I used to have a kind of party trick," he said. "What if a new-age musician were to play Monk? I was exploring how to dumb something down authentically. One day I was doing a record with [singer] Curtis Stigers. We

GREGORY TARDY – CLARINET
REGINA CARTER – VIOLIN
TABER GABLE – PIANO
MATTHEW PARRISH – BASS
ALVESTER GARNETT – DRUMS

IN HIS TIMING is the delightful debut clarinet recording from clarinetist and composer Gregory Tardy.

Over the years his clarinet playing has been featured in the bands of Tom Harrell, Andrew Hill, Dave Douglas, Bill Frisell, Elio Villafranca, Brian Lynch, Chris Potter, Regina Carter, Stefon Harris and many others. Tardy was also a featured soloist at the ICA ClarinetFest 2022. IN HIS TIMING brings Tardy's clarinet front and center along with his inventive compositions on his third outing on WJ3 Records.

www.WJ3records.com WJ3 www.GregoryTardy.com

DANA PLEASANT

Tap dancer Melinda Sullivan and Goldings have toured as a duo and are planning a record.

A TAP-DANCE DUO

The captivating tap-and-piano duo of Larry Goldings and Melinda Sullivan, a highly acclaimed tap dancer and choreographer, came about more or less by accident.

Sullivan says: "I had met Larry at a fundraiser at Café Largo. My father-in-law is a huge fan of Larry's. So my husband said, why don't you ask Larry to do a song for my dad's birthday. I offered to pay him. He said no, just come to my studio, and we'll videotape it. We did 'Somewhere' from *West Side Story*. I thanked him profusely, and was about to go, but he said, 'No, let's do another one.' It was 'These Foolish Things,' and it was all improvised. Then Larry said, 'Let's put it out on the Internet.' And we got this huge response."

The duo is, in practice and effect, more like a trio: Goldings' right hand on piano, his left hand on walking synth bass and Sullivan's staggeringly adroit percussion riffs. The videos proved so popular that they started getting duo bookings in L.A. at major clubs like Sam First and Herb Alpert's Vibrato, where they sold out the room. A tour of California and the Southwest followed in December 2023.

Live audiences appreciate getting to watch Sullivan's grace and athleticism, in addition to the music. It's been generating a joyous response. People just respond to the groove, she says. "I don't always have to do trick stuff."

These days, Sullivan thinks of herself as a percussionist. "I am, of course, influenced by the great tap dancers like Gregory Hines and Jimmy Slyde, but now, especially because Larry and I are recording an album together, I think, 'If you were closing your eyes and listening to me what would it sound like?'" The album will be more experimental in nature than their viral videos, with Sullivan making beats in various media and Goldings improvising to them.

Goldings' collaborating partner Peter Bernstein says of the duo with Sullivan, "When you hear them together, the way he is playing is incredible — he doesn't need anybody to swing, and she's really strong. Together they feel all the accents. They make it sound so simple to swing, but it's not an easy thing to do for either of them. It's pretty astounding, actually." DB

MARK SHELDON

Goldings' versatility keeps him in high demand as a leader, collaborator and sideman.

were finishing up, and I was joking around. This is before Hans. I started playing Monk's 'Bemsha Swing' without Monk's chords. I thought, what if George Winston played that or 'Well, You Needn't'?

"Then I thought, what if I put it up on a fake MySpace page? I'll post five 30-second selections of this guy playing Monk. I looked on the Internet to see if the name 'Hans Groiner' was original. I found a darkened photo and wrote a fake bio.

"That was my first experience, just audio clips. It went viral in a MySpace way. An equal amount of people got the joke as said, 'Who the hell do you think you are?' and 'You haven't got the slightest idea about Monk!' I really enjoyed sitting back anonymously and watching it happen. People even sent it to me, not knowing it was me, and saying, 'I think you're going to like this.' I didn't even realize I could fool people like that."

He considered asking a friend with a good German accent to be the face of Hans, but others implored him to do it himself.

"I bought a wig at Target. Louis Cole's sister Liz shot it for me … and it really took off. The next time I went to a jazz festival, everyone was coming up to me and saying, 'Hans!'" A film of Groiner's "master class" at L.A.'s Blue Whale is in the works.

Early Days & Influences

Growing up in the Boston suburbs, Goldings was a piano prodigy. He discovered his love for the organ early on.

"It all started in my childhood basement, with home organs," he said. "We had, over the course of my youth, a Lowrey, a Yamaha and a monolith of a Gulbransen that my dad found for free. My mom used to drop me at Baldwin Piano & Organ in Framingham, and she'd go shopping while I'd stay for hours trying out these organ-spaceships, and I'd be in heaven."

One of his earliest influences on piano was fellow Boston resident Dave McKenna, whose legendary facility at walking bass lines with his left hand were the inspiration for Goldings' widely admired left-handed and foot-driven bass lines on piano and organ, respectively. He cites many other influences on piano: George Shearing, whose solo album *My Ship* made an indelible impression, Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, Ahmad Jamal and Keith Jarrett, from whom he took three memorable lessons at Jarrett's home while still in high school. On organ, he credits Billy Preston ("Before I knew anything about jazz organ, I loved him, and he sparked something in me"), Jimmy Smith, Shirley Scott, Larry Young, Wild Bill Davis and Mel Rhyne.

Goldings met Bernstein when both were still in high school.

"We played gigs as teenagers," Bernstein said. "He even played on my senior recital. Larry at 15 was pretty mature; he sounded like a grownup, a pro. He had this uncommon composure and polish in his playing. He was already ready to do gigs when he arrived at the New School — a badass."

Bernstein recounts how the organ trio got its start: "Larry had a gig at Augie's [on New York's Upper West Side; the club is now

Smoke]. They didn't have a piano, so Larry had to bring a keyboard. That's where he started playing organ on gigs. He started by working in a group with Leon Parker, the drummer. One night when Leon's bass player couldn't make the gig, he asked Larry to play bass on a keyboard."

Eventually the two friends started playing as a trio on Thursdays with the addition of Stewart, whom Bernstein had known from William Paterson College. Their first record, on Minor Music, was picked up by RCA in 1991. Performances at the Blue Note, Visiones and the Village Gate followed. Goldings was eventually signed by Warner Bros.; he took Bernstein and Stewart along for his first album for the label in 1995.

Why has the trio lasted so long? "I don't know," Bernstein said, "Nothing came along to end it. There is something special about when the three of us come together. It's a beautiful thing. Some of the best playing we do is in this group. You can reach for stuff because you're so comfortable being among old friends."

'I've learned that [jazz] is not always about harmony — it can be hard for jazz musicians to turn off that stuff — it's also about texture, mood, simplicity.'

Considering his remarkable piano playing, how did Goldings feel about being better known playing organ? "I think it's fine," he said. "I'm not bitter about it. It was sort of an accident that I find myself at the organ more than the piano. But I think our trio has made an imprint — it stands out as being a little different."

Goldings won't be restricted to just one style. "I think the common denominator in any situation I'm in is to make choices that are emotional choices," he said. "The reason for musicians to become familiar with different ways of playing the same chord — for example, the sound of a seventh or a triad — is so you can pull spontaneously the one choice that is correct or helpful in an emotional way.

"The older I get, the less concerned I am about being 'consistent' with my recordings. There are those who might prefer hearing me play jazz organ, but I want to explore all that I can, musically and sonically. I think it's possible to have an identifiable sound as a musician, even while playing disparate genres or while exploring different keyboards … . The colors may change, even the language one speaks can change, but your personality can remain intact, as well as your overall intent — which for me is to create music with emotion." **DB**

ECM

VIJAY IYER
LINDA MAY HAN OH
TYSHAWN SOREY

Photo: Ogata

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DOWNBEAT 2024 INTERNATIONAL

JAZZ VENUE GUIDE

THE CLUBS ARE HOPPING

With more vitality than we've seen in years, jazz clubs are once again the toast of their respective towns!

Sourced by Frank Alkyer

Pianist Kris Davis contemplates the moment at Chicago's Green Mill. (Photo by Michael Jackson)

UNITED STATES

Snug Harbor, one of the great music listening rooms in the world tucked into a little corner of New Orleans.

EAST

CONNECTICUT

Firehouse 12
New Haven, CT
Firehouse 12's recording studio doubles as an intimate 75-seat auditorium, where its Jazz Series runs for 12 weeks during the spring and fall. On tap last fall were Ches Smith, Sara Serpa & André Matos, the Ben Wolfe Quartet and Tyshawn Sorey.
firehouse12.com

The Side Door Jazz Club
Old Lyme, CT
Billed as the "only club" between Boston and New York City, The Side Door rests in the historic Old Lyme Inn. It's operated by an ambitious, jazz-loving couple. Recent acts include Christian Sands, the Bill Charlap Trio and the Greg Abate Quartet.
thesidedoorjazz.com

FLORIDA

Heidi's Jazz Club & Restaurant
Cocoa Beach, FL
Heidi's nails ambiance, delivering regional artists in an intimate, 100-seat setting. Heidi's features local and touring artists. Recent performers include bluesmen Mike Zito and Tinsley Ellis as well as New Orleans favorite John Papa Gros.
heidisjazzclub.com

Judson's Live
Orlando, FL
Here's a new entry into Orlando's music scene. Opening in February, the club's first headliner was scheduled to be the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis. The lineup early on features jazz and blues stalwarts like Keb' Mo', Jane Monheit and Joshua Redman.
judsonslive.org

MARYLAND

An Die Musik Live!
Baltimore, MD
The venue offers 20-plus concerts each month ranging from local to international artists. After the pandemic, the club continues to livestream shows as well as welcoming and including in-person audiences.
andiemusiklive.com

Keystone Korner Baltimore
Baltimore, MD
Back in the 1970s, the Keystone Korner San Francisco served as a magnet for jazz greatness. Todd Barkan has brought the vibe back on the other coast. Ravi Coltrane, Warren Wolf, Lafayette Gilchrist, Cyrus Chestnut and Dee Dee Bridgewater have recently filled the room.
keystonekorner.com

MASSACHUSETTS

The Lilypad
Cambridge, MA
The Lilypad programs an array of musical styles with a heavy dose of jazz from local legends like The Fringe and saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi. Recent shows have featured Dave Rempis, Francisco Mela & Jonathan Reisin.
lilypadinman.com

Scullers Jazz Club
Boston, MA
A fixture since 1989, Sculler's features top names on weekends like the Ari Hoenig Trio, Adam Nussbaum's Leadbelly Project and the Dave Stryker Quartet and weekday sets by area musicians.
scullersjazz.com

Wally's Café Jazz Club
Boston, MA
Wally's, founded in 1947, Wally's was the first Black-owned jazz club in New England — a tiny room showcases young talent.
wallyscafe.com

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Jimmy's Jazz & Blues Club
Portsmouth, NH
Housed in a former YMCA, the club creates a cool, industrial vibe from this landmark structure. Recent acts include John Pizzarelli, Kat Edmonson, Kandace Springs and the Bill Charlap Trio.
jimmysoncongress.com

NEW JERSEY

Shanghai Jazz
Madison, NJ
Shanghai Jazz hosts a wealth of talent in the New York/New Jersey area, including Warren Vaché, Harry Allen and the Olli Soikkeli Trio. Since 1995, the club pays homage to the vibrant music scene of Shanghai, China, in the 1920s.
shanghaijazz.com

NEW YORK

Birdland
New York, NY
Planted in Manhattan's theater district, Birdland features some of the finest jazz players in the world. February's lineup includes Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks, the Harry Allen Quartet and Frank Vignola's Guitar Night.
birdlandjazz.com

Blue Note
New York, NY
New York may be the club's hub, but its network with spots in Hawaii, Napa, Tokyo, Rio, São Paulo, Milan, Bejing and Shanghai help attract the best acts in the world. January's lineup featured Chris Botti, Meshell Ndegeocello and Keyon Harrold's Foreverland.
bluenotejazz.com

Dizzy's Club
New York, NY
The entire Jazz at Lincoln Center complex offers fantastic listening experiences, but Dizzy's Club, with its glass-walled view of Central Park, presents something special. February bookings include Warren Wolf & the History of Vibraphone, the Ted Nash Big Band and Endea Owens and the Cookout.
jazz.org/dizzys

Jazz Forum
Tarrytown, NY
The Jazz Forum is known for its intimate atmosphere, acoustics and eclectic programming. The nonprofit organization that runs the club also hosts educational programs, free outdoor summer concerts and monthly jam sessions. Recent acts include Catherine Russell, John Pizzarelli and Paquito D'Rivera.
jazzforumarts.org

Jazz Gallery
New York, NY
The Jazz Gallery is an intimate listening room in the Flatiron District of Manhattan presenting established and emerging artists who challenge convention. Recent headliners have included Roy Hargrove Big Band (monthly residency), Aaron Parks and Darcy James Argue's Secret Society.
jazzgallery.org

Mezzrow
New York, NY
Under the umbrella of the SmallsLIVE Foundation, Mezzrow is a sister club to Smalls featuring an über intimate listening experience with great acoustics in this tube-shaped, underground club. Recent performers include the Ralph Alessi Quartet, Isaiah Collier & the Chosen Few and the George Garzone Trio.
mezzrow.com

NUBLU
New York, NY
This East Village club presents a variety of

music in a three-level space. Recent performers include Giles Night, Felix Pastorius and Joel Ross. The two locations are 151 Avenue C, and Nubu Classic at 62 Avenue C.

nublu.net

Smalls
New York, NY

Another of the great, tiny New York basement clubs, Smalls serves as a hub for established players and upstarts. January shows featured Alan Broadbent, the Pasquale Grasso Trio, the Johnny O'Neal Trio and the Sheryl Bailey Trio.

smallslive.com

SMOKE
New York, NY

One of New York's premier venues, Smoke offers top-notch programming of timeless jazz. Founded in 1999, Smoke boasts a Grammy-nominated label, Smoke Sessions Records, and a celebrated streaming concert series, Smoke Screens. Its annual Coltrane Festival is a must, and recent performances include Brad Mehldau, the Jonathan Blake Pentad and the Emmet Cohen B3 Trio.

smokejazz.com

The Stone at The New School
New York, NY

The Stone serves as a great listening room for creative improvisation beyond borders. Founded in 2005 by John Zorn, it features an interesting residency series with artists like Caroline Davis and Ikue More.

thestonenyc.com

Village Vanguard
New York, NY

Founded in 1935, the Vanguard is the most-revered room in New York and continues to be a bucket-list destination for music lovers. January featured the Chris Potter Quartet, the Kris Davis Trio, Fred Hersch and Ethan Iverson.

villagevanguard.com

PENNSYLVANIA

Chris' Jazz Café
Pittsburgh, PA

Founded in 1989, it's the longest continuously operating jazz club in the history of Philadelphia.

chrisjazzcafe.com

MCG Jazz
Pittsburgh, PA

Since 1877 MCG Jazz has preserved,presented and promoted jazz in its intimate 350-seat music hall. Recent acts include Artemis, Eliane Elias, Sean Jones, Samara Joy and Hubert Laws.

mcgjazz.org

South Restaurant & Jazz Club
Philadelphia, PA

Southern cuisine and an intimate space make South a must-stop up north. Recent shows include Gerald Veasley, V Shayne Frederick, Chris "Big Dog" Davis and Edgardo Cintron & the Incaband.

southjazzkitchen.com

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Blues Alley
Washington, D.C.

Blues Alley showcases an array of international and local talent. Upcoming shows feature Candice Springs, Marion Meadows and The Bad Plus.

bluesalley.com

The Club at Studio K
Washington, D.C.

This 160-seat venue is booked by Jason Moran, the Kennedy Center's artistic director for jazz. Upcoming shows include Linda May Han Oh, Allison Miller and Myra Melford's Lux Quartet.

kennedy-center.org/reach/studio-k-club

SOUTH

GEORGIA

The Velvet Note
Alpharetta, GA

The venue presents jazz Thursday-Sunday in a space designed for comfort. A full restaurant/bar adds to the ambience. Recent bookings include the Nicole Zuraitis, Lionel Cole and a host of strong local talent.

thevelvetnote.com

LOUISIANA

Blue Nile
New Orleans, LA

One of the original clubs on the Frenchmen Street scene presents music every night. Regular performers include Kermit Ruffins, the New Breed Brass Band and the Where Ya At Brass Band.
bluenilelive.com

Kermit's Treme Mother-In-Law Lounge
New Orleans, LA
Founded by Ernie K-Doe in 1994, this low-tech beauty serves as a brass band party starter. Kermit Ruffins opened it back up with great music and great food, often cooked by Ruffins himself.
kermitslounge.com

Preservation Hall
New Orleans, LA
Intimate, pure and swinging, several sets happen nightly at this famed French Quarter club. The emphasis is on traditional NOLA jazz.
preservationhall.com

SNUG HARBOR JAZZ BISTRO
New Orleans, LA
If you want a night out listening to great jazz in a comfortable atmosphere on legendary Frenchmen Street, Snug Harbor is the place. Famous musical families like Marsalises and Nevilles frequently perform, confirming its status as a premier jazz club in New Orleans. Recent performers include Joshua Redman, Jon Batiste and Cyrille Aimee.
snugjazz.com

Tipitina's
New Orleans, LA
Owned by the band Galactic, Tipitina's delivers eclectic musical experiences. 2024 has sold-out dates with the Radiators, Galactic featuring Anjelika "Jelly" Joseph, Big Freedia and Dumpstaphunk.
tipitinas.com

NORTH CAROLINA

SHARP 9 GALLERY
Durham, NC
Presenting more than 100 concerts a year, Sharp 9 highlights local artists as well as regional and national acts.
durhamjazzworkshop.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

THE JAZZ CORNER
Hilton Head Island, SC
Celebrating nearly a quarter-century of presenting jazz, this 99-seat venue offers music and gourmet food with two shows nightly. The Martin Lesch Band plays every Monday in January.
thejazzcorner.com

TENNESSEE

Rudy's Jazz Room
Nashville, TN
A 2017 addition to Nashville's music scene, Rudy's presents jazz nightly in an intimate setting. Chef and co-owner Michael Braden offers a New Orleans-based menu and a full bar.
rudysjazzroom.com

TEXAS

SCAT JAZZ LOUNGE
Fort Worth, TX
This venue provides downtown Fort Worth with a classic venue for local and international jazz musicians to perform.
scatjazzlounge.com

MIDWEST

ILLINOIS

The Jazz Showcase
Chicago, IL
The Showcase was founded in 1947 by the late Joe Segal. It's now owned and operated by his son, Wayne, who maintains the club's high standards. Recent bookings have included Russell Gunn, Keyon Harrold, Tim Warfield, Corey Wilkes and Marquis Hill.
jazzshowcase.com

The Green Mill
Chicago, IL
Featuring perhaps the coolest jazz club ambiance in Chicago, the Mill is an old prohibition-era speakeasy. Recent acts include Donny McCaslin, Chris Foreman and The Chicago Jazz Composer's Collective.
greenmilljazz.com

Andy's Jazz Club
Chicago, IL
A staple of the River North neighborhood, Andy's digs deep into Chicago's wealth of jazz talent while offering up top-notch food and drinks.
andysjazzclub.com

Constellation
Chicago, IL
Low-key with excellent acoustics, Constellation offers more than 200 concerts a year. Recent acts include The Brunt with Mai Sugimoto + Katie Ernst and William Tyler & the Impossible Truth.
constellation-chicago.com

Hungry Brain
Chicago, IL
Hungry Brain serves as an incubator for the city's up-and-coming musicians.
hungrybrainchicago.com

Space
Evanston, IL
Space has become one of the most eclectic clubs around. Recent acts include the John Scofield Trio, Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart Organ Trio and the Rebirth Brass Band.
evanstonspace.com

Winter's Jazz Club
Chicago, IL
This cozy jazz room hosts a local artists in a great listening room and a hip location. Recent acts include Victor Goines, the Chicago Soul Jazz Collective, Paul Marinaro and Patricia Barber.
wintersjazzclub.com

INDIANA

THE JAZZ KITCHEN
Indianapolis, IN
Celebrating its 30th anniversary, The Jazz Kitchen features an intimate, 140-seat room with nightly shows. The club offers a full menu and bar. Bookings for 2024 include Tony Monaco, Tierney Sutton & Tamir Hendelman and The Bad Plus.
thejazzkitchen.com

MICHIGAN

Blue Llama
Ann Arbor, MI
Since 2019, Blue Llama Jazz Club is a destination for jazz, food and wine enthusiasts. Recent acts include Kurt Elling, Samara Joy and Etienne Charles.
bluellamaclub.com

Cliff Bell's
Detroit, MI
This classic art-deco club reopened in 2005 offering up-and-coming musicians and established artists. Past acts include Leon Redbone, Snarky Puppy and Samara Joy.
cliffbells.com

Dirty Dog Jazz Cafe
Gross Pointe Farms, MI
The 65-seat suburban Detroit club offers music Tuesday-Saturday, offering a mix of regional and national acts.
dirtydogjazz.com

MINNESOTA

CROONERS LOUNGE & SUPPER CLUB
Minneapolis, MN
A star of the Twin Cities music scene with classic supper club fare, Crooners presents several spaces for great listening. The venue offers an eclectic musical mix as it enters its 10th year. Recent headliners include Ben Sidran, Bobby Lyle, Ann Hampton Callaway and Ethan Iverson.
croonersloungemn.com

Dakota Jazz Club
Minneapolis, MN
Since 1985, internationally acclaimed and regionally artists have filled the calendar. Recent acts include Robert Glasper, Jake Shimabukuro and The Bad Plus.
dakotacooks.com

MISSOURI

Ferring Jazz Bistro
St. Louis, MO
The 200-seat Ferring Jazz Bistro hosts shows year round, featuring national acts and area musicians. Upcoming performances feature Bily Childs, Jazz at Lincoln Center and Camille Thurman.
jazzstl.org

Murry's
Columbia, MO
Local acts are presented Monday-Saturday. And the "We Always Swing" Sunday at Murray's concert series brings in big names. Early 2024 bookings include the Alexa Tarantino, Immanuel Wilkins and Benny Green.
murrysrestaurant.net

OHIO

BLU JAZZ+
Akron, OH
BLU Jazz+ has been keeping the local jazz scene thriving since 2013, featuring live music five nights a week. Recent headliners include Alexia Bomtempo, Benny Benack III and Dan Wilson.
blujazzakron.com

Bop Stop
Cleveland, OH
Great acoustics, views of Lake Erie and a swinging dose of local jazz — that's what makes the Bop Stop a first-rate jazz room.
themusicsettlement.org/bop-stop

WEST

ARIZONA

The Nash
Phoenix, AZ
Celebrating 12 years, The Nash is the only full-time jazz club in Phoenix, with 300 shows annually. The 2023 season included Eric Alexander, Pat Bianchi and Randy Brecker.
thenash.org

THE RAVENSCROFT
Scottsdale, AZ
Ravenscroft offers two new performance spaces for jazz. Jazzbird hosts regional and national artists on Friday nights (September-June). Ravenscroft Hall is an intimate, 200-seat concert hall. Upcoming acts include Brian Blade & the Fellowship Band, the Rachel Eckroth Quartet and Donny McCaslin.
theravenscroft.com

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

BACH DANCING & DYNAMITE SOCIETY
Half Moon Bay, CA
The Bach presents world-class jazz in an intimate setting with stunning views of the ocean. Recent acts include Joshua Redman, John Scofield and Samara Joy.
bachddsoc.org

Black Cat
San Francisco, CA
Black Cat is another beautiful club in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, offering up acts like Theo Croker, Tyreek McDole and Benny Benack III.
blackcatsf.com

KUUMBWA JAZZ
Santa Cruz, CA
Since 1975, Kuumbwa has grown to present over 130 concerts annually and year-round music education programs. Recent acts include Hiromi, Joshua Redman and Meshell Ndegeocello.
kuumbwajazz.org

Mr. Tipple's Recording Studio
San Francisco, CA
Intimacy, ambiance and local talent, Mr. Tipple's offers it up.
mrtipplessf.com

YOSHI'S
Oakland, CA
The legendary club celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022. With a great Japanese menu and even better music, the club recently hosted Simon Phillips Protocol V, The Stanley Clarke Band and Eric Benét.
yoshis.com

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Baked Potato
Studio City, CA
Since 1970, fusion bands and electric groups have called this funky bar home. Recent performers include the Scott Kinsey Group, the Ernie Watts Group and Stu Hamm.
thebakedpotato.com

Catalina Bar & Grill
Los Angeles, CA
This sprawling performance space has hosted the jazz greats. Recent acts include Roberto Gambarini, Stanley Jordan and Nellie McKay.
catalinajazzclub.com

LOBERO THEATRE
Santa Barbera, CA
Since 1949, this theater has offered the legends of jazz. Recently included among "The 11 Most Beautiful Theaters in the World" by Architectural Digest, recent acts include Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Charles Lloyd 85th Birthday Celebration, The Derek Douget Band and Tierney Sutton.
lobero.org

Sam First
Los Angeles, CA
This intimate, modern cocktail bar is within walking distance of baggage claim at LAX and wraps its performance space with a record label and recording studio. Early 2024 bookings include Eric Scott, Gerald Clayton's Tuesday Happenings and Clarence Penn's The Arrival.
samfirstbar.com

COLORADO

Dazzle
Denver, CO
In 2023, Dazzle moved into the Denver Performing Arts Complex. A serious listening room, recent acts include the Golden Striker Trio with Ron Carter, Donald Vega and Russell Malone; Brandee Younger; and the Jason Marsalis Quartet.
dazzledenver.com

NEW MEXICO

Outpost Performance Space
Albuquerque, NM
The Outpost has been presenting jazz and other music since 1988. Recent acts include Immanuel Wilkins, Django Festival Allstars and Lakecia Benjamin.
outpostspace.org

WASHINGTON

Dimitriou's Jazz Alley
Seattle, WA
For 30-plus years, this magnet for big-name touring acts has served Seattle with bookings like Chris Botti, Lakecia Benjamin, Lee Ritenour and Dave Grusin.
jazzalley.com

The Royal Room
Seattle, WA
This funky, cool venue was the brainchild of musician Wayne Horvitz. The space hosts educational programs and evening sets by local musicians.
theroyalroomseattle.com

INTERNATIONAL

AUSTRIA

Jazzland
Vienna
Jazzland, the quaint cellar club billed as the oldest in Austria, celebrated its 41st anniversary in 2023. Recent performances include Lew Tabakin, the Vienna Cake Walkers, the Vienna Composers Big Band and Rossano Sportiello.
jazzland.at

PORGY & BESS
Vienna
The non-profit organization bills itself as a jazz and music club with a multifaceted program. A favorite with musicians, recent shows have included the Kirk Lightsey Quartet, the Karl Ratzer Trio & Sexteto Brazil and Rapjael Wressnig.
porgy.at

CANADA

Dièse Onze
Montreal
This cozy club is a favorite spot for dedicated jazz fans and was the recent site of a recording by pianist Jean-Michel Pilc. Live shows are anchored by the Kim Richardson Trio and the Alex Bellegarde Latin Jazz Quartet.
dieseonze.com

FRANKIE'S JAZZ CLUB
Vancouver
A live jazz hub featuring local, national and international artists, Frankie's serves as Vancouver's home for live jazz and blues. Recent acts include the Bill Charlap Trio, Peter Bernstein, the Heavy Hitters featuring Mike LeDonne and Eric Alexander as well as Champian Fulton.
frankiesitaliankitchen.ca

The Rex Jazz & Blues Bar
Toronto
With some 60 shows monthly, this musicians' congregating point is the place to catch a host of great Canadian talent. Recent acts include the Dave Young Quintet and the Thompson Eggbo-Eggbo Trio.
therex.ca

Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill
Montreal
From midweek jams to weekend headliners featuring Montreal and Canadian talent, as well as touring musicians from the States, Upstairs offers a cool, throwback vibe.
upstairsjazz.com

YARDBIRD SUITE
Edmonton
The Yardbird Suite has been Edmonton's home for jazz for 66 years and counting. This 150-seat club offers Tuesday jam sessions and artists from near and far Thursday-Sunday. Recent acts include the Queen's Cartoonists, Laila Biali, Ostara Project and the Tord Gustavsen Trio.
yardbirdsuite.com

CZECH REPUBLIC

AghaRTA Jazz Centrum
Prague
AghaRTA is a basement venue housed in a building dating back to the 14th century. As one of the most popular jazz spots in Prague, this venue/bar/Arta Records label shop hosts local jazz artists nightly as well as international touring musicians.
agharta.cz

The Jazz Dock
Prague
Hip architecture, high-end meals, great drinks, a view of the Vltava River and concerts by top-shelf artists make this a bucket-list destination.
jazzdock.cz

ENGLAND

The 606 Club
London
Since 1976, this basement club has been run by musician Steve Rubie with a mission to present the best artists from the U.K. The club has grown from a 30-seater to 120, but the vibe remains intimate with speakeasy spoken here.
606club.co.uk

Cafe OTO
London
Cafe OTO offers space for creative new music and musicians going beyond the mainstream. Commissions, residencies and concert recordings are part of the programming at this venue.
cafeoto.co.uk

Jazz Cafe
London
With gourmet food and live concerts, Jazz Cafe has seated views upstairs and a downstairs dance floor. Funk and soul bookings share the marquée with the likes of the Dele Sosimi Afrobeat Orchestra.
thejazzcafelondon.com

Pizza Express Jazz Club
London
Great pizza and jazz go together like peanut butter and jelly at this venue in the heart of Soho. Since 1976, this basement club has presented some of the top names in jazz.
pizzaexpresslive.com

Ronnie Scott's
London
Since 1959, Ronnie Scott's has been celebrating the biggest names in jazz and blues in the heart of London's Soho district. For early 2024, the venue has booked Incognito, Kevin Hayes, Camilla George and the Stacey Brothers' Big Band Steely Dan.
ronniescotts.co.uk

The Vortex
London
This intimate nonprofit establishment features a variety of jazz styles focusing on free-improv.
vortexjazz.co.uk

ESTONIA

Philly Joe's Jazz Club
Tallinn
Philly Joe's Jazz Club is Estonia's incubator for jazz, with a mission to elevate the Estonian jazz scene by nurturing local young talent while also welcoming world-class icons. Recent performances include Anat Fort & Sooäär/Remmel/Ruben, Charlie Porter and the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra.
phillyjoes.com

FINLAND

Storyville
Helsinki
This two-story venue has a piano bar above and a supper club below for four lively musical nights each week.
storyville.fi

FRANCE

Duc Des Lombards
Paris
With weekend late-night jam sessions and series like The New Scene for up-and-coming musicians, Duc Des Lombards features European talent and U.S. artists.
ducdeslombards.com

Le Caveau de la Huchette
Paris
Since 1946, this "temple of swing" has been a jazz staple in the Latin Quarter. It's home to

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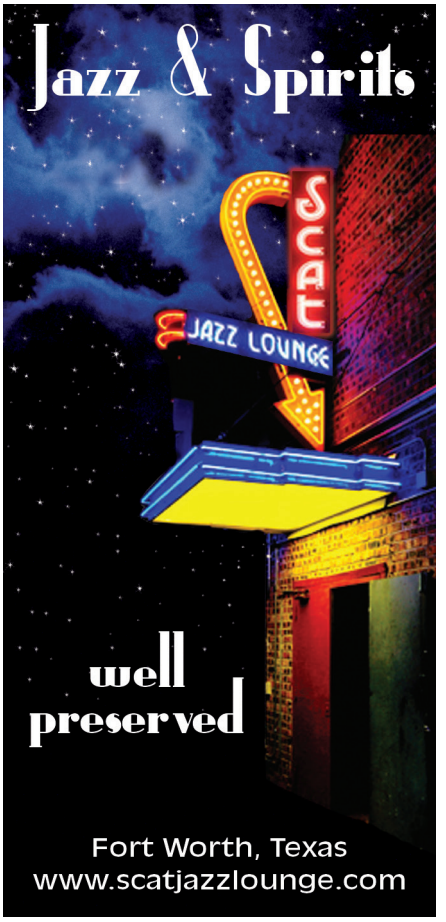

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caveaudelahuchette.fr

New Morning
Paris
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newmorning.com

Sunset-Sunside
Paris
Offering music nightly, this club has hosted the likes of the Jesse Davis Quartet, Norma Winstone and more.
sunset-sunside.com

GERMANY

A-Trane
Berlin
Immanuel Wilkins and Jerry Granelli are among the touring artists to play this 30-year-old spot, which serves German and international cuisine.
a-trane.de

BIX Jazzclub
Stuttgart
Mouth-watering food options and live music Tuesday through Saturday make this 13-year-old space pop.
bix-stuttgart.de

Ella & Louis Jazz Club
Mannheim
Ella & Louis Jazz Club is one of the most dynamic jazz clubs in Germany. The club hosts performances four nights a week, featuring local, national and international jazz luminaries. Recent performers include Marylin Mazur, Harry Allen, Philippe Katerine, Bill Evans and Mike Stern.
ellalouis.de

JAZZCLUB UNTERFAHRT
Munich
Jazzclub Unterfahrt has presented a wide range of international jazz artists for more than 45 years, featuring 360 shows every year. The club features a concert series presenting music from different countries. Recent acts include Myra Melford's Fire and Water Quintet, Michael Mayo, James Carter and the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra.
unterfahrt.de

Jazz im Prinz Karl
Tübingen
The 45-year-old, membership-driven institution recently has presented Miguel Zenón & Luis Perdomo and Chris Potter.
jipk.net

Jazzkeller
Frankfurt
Jazzkeller is another subterranean beauty with great acoustics and the feel of old-school, intimate performances. Recent acts include the Jesse Davis Quartet, the Wayne Escoffery Quartet, the David Kikoski Trio, the Erena Terakubo Quartet and the Vincent Herring/Eric Alexander Quartet.
jazzkeller.com

ISRAEL

Beit Haamudim
Tel Aviv
Beit Haamundim hosts the best of Israeli's jazz scene seven days a week.
facebook.com/beithaamudim

ITALY

Alexanderplatz
Rome
Italy's premier jazz club was refurbished a few years back and continues to emphasize small-group concerts in classic and modern styles.
alexanderplatzjazz.com

Casa del Jazz
Rome
With three venues, Casa del Jazz delivers a variety of concerts including plenty of jazz.
casadeljazz.com

JAPAN

Body & Soul
Tokyo
Since 1974, this venue — which seats about 50 — has presented high-quality Japanese jazz artists.
bodyandsoul.co.jp

Shinjuku Pit Inn
Tokyo
Known for showcasing domestic artists, this 57-year-old venue (31 years in its current location) is a revered listening room.
pit-inn.com

LATVIA

M/Darbnīca
Riga
M/Darbnīca is a cultural space located in the heart of Riga, dedicated to fostering a vibrant music community. Emerging and established musicians from jazz and other genres converge, promoting classic jazz, new compositions and the art of improvisation.
mdarbnica.lv

VEF Jazz Club
Riga
VEF Jazz Club concert series began in 2018, offering jazz lovers a chance to enjoy regional and internationally known musicians. VEF Jazz Club has hosted concerts of Denis Pashkevich Sextet, Trio Vein, Peter Sarik Trio, Michael Pipoquinha and more.
vefkp.lv

MEXICO

Zinco Jazz Club
Mexico City
With a great menu and intimate, modern decor, this underground club has earned a reputation for hipness.
zincojazz.com

THE NETHERLANDS

Bimhuis
Amsterdam
This internationally acclaimed concert hall boasts a 48-year history and more than 300 concerts annually by the likes of the Benoît Delbecq 4 Quartet and the Danilo Pérez/John Patitucci/Adam Cruz Trio.
bimhuis.com

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Derek Douget Band
Photo: David Bazemore

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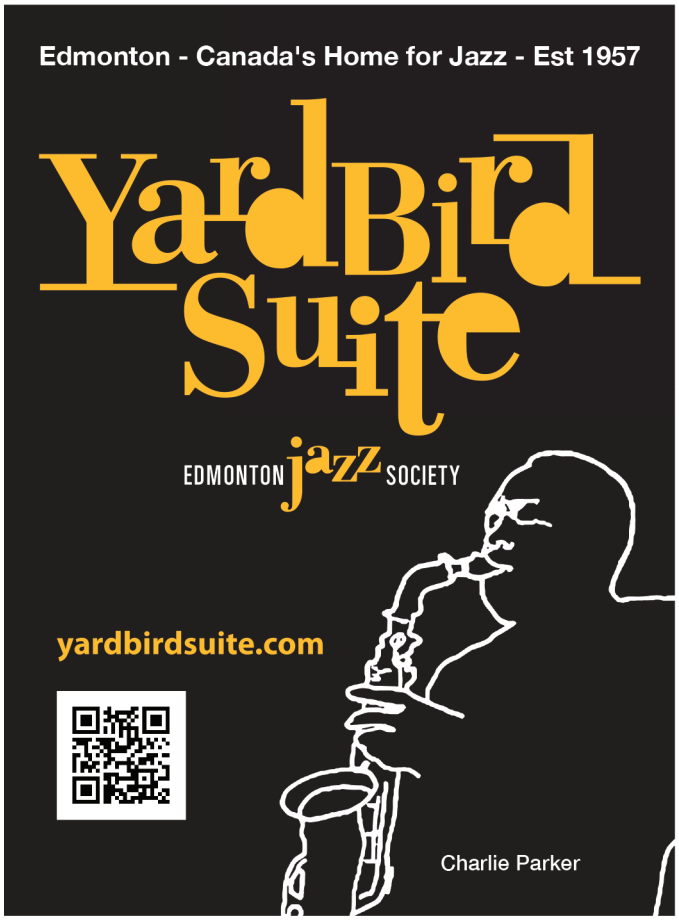

NORWAY

Victoria Nasjonal Jazz Scene

Oslo

Housed in a stylish setting, Victoria Nasjonal Jazz Scene can accommodate 300 people. Norway's vibrant jazz scene is represented here, as are touring musicians like Palle Mikelborg/Jakob Bro/Marilyn Mazur.

nasjonaljazzscene.no/en

RUSSIA

Igor Butman Jazz Club

Moscow/St. Petersburg

While relations with Russia make it impossible to travel there at this time, famed saxophonist Igor Butman's two clubs present Russian artists as well as international touring acts.

butmanclub.ru

SCOTLAND

The Jazz Bar

Edinburgh

Established in 2005, The Jazz Bar showcases world-class, multi-genre live music in a cool and atmospheric setting. Harnessing Edinburgh's kaleidoscopic creative talents into a massive offering of year-round live gigs, this multiple award-winning basement venue is great for a Saturday afternoon coffee, a fresh cocktail or a cold pint. Recent performances include Georgia Cecile, Valery Ponomarev and Fergus McCreadie.

thejazzbar.co.uk

SPAIN

Jamboree

Barcelona

This classic club has hosted the greats since 1960 — from Duke Ellington and Ornette Coleman to Barcelona native son Jorge Rossy.

jamboreejazz.com

SWEDEN

Fasching

Stockholm

Since its inception in 1977, Fasching has grown to become Scandinavia's largest organizer of jazz. Jazz club Fasching is one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious. Historically, the likes of Chet Baker, Carla Bley, Chick Corea and more have graced the stage. Recent acts include Makaya McCraven, Joyce Moreno, Bebel Gilberto and Steve Gadd.

fasching.se

SWITZERLAND

Marian's Jazz Room

Bern

Since 1992, this 130-capacity room has been open from September through May. Known for great acoustics its 2023 jazz festival, running from March 21-May 23, features residencies by the Frank Vignola Trio, the Chihiro Yamanaka Trio and the Houston Person Quartet.

mariansjazzroom.ch

TURKEY

Nardis Jazz Club

Istanbul

Founded in 2002 and housed in a historic building and seating 120 people, Nardis presents mostly local musicians, two sets a night, Monday through Saturday.

nardisjazz.com

The Badau

Istanbul

The foundations of The Badau, Turkey's only gastro-jazz club, were laid in 2015 as a small chef's kitchen and jazz club in Istanbul by Eren Noyan, owner, chef and jazz singer. The room has become home to many local musicians as well as international acts passing through the region.

instagram.com/thebadau.istanbul

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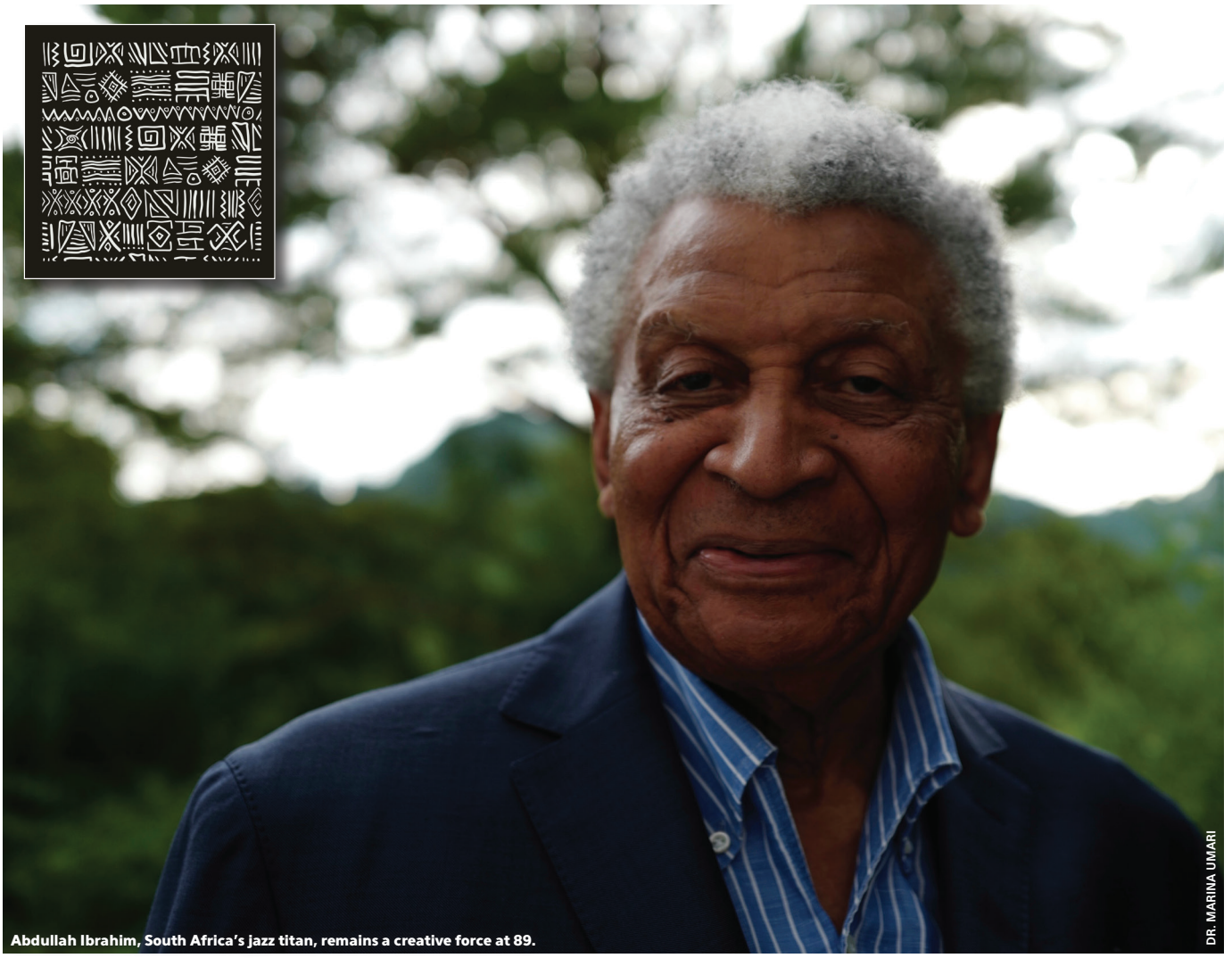


Abdullah Ibrahim, South Africa's jazz titan, remains a creative force at 89.

DR. MARINA UMARI

Abdullah Ibrahim

3

GEARBOX

★★★★

Since 2019, South African jazz luminary Abdullah Ibrahim has released multiple recordings, including *The Balance*, which featured his eight-person ensemble Ekaya, and two solo piano albums expressing the finely tuned minimalism of his playing. The 89-year-old pianist's new double album *3* finds the perfect middle ground within this recent oeuvre, featuring a trio of piano, strings and woodwinds performing live to tape as well as before a live audience of London's Barbican concert hall.

The six tracks on the album's tape performance are richly textured and immediate. Opening on Noah Jackson's bowed cello and Cleave Guyton's wistful flute playing on "Barakat," Ibrahim provides typically sparse yet engaging accompaniment, allowing his melodies to float without being weighed down by overplaying.

Many of the tape performances are similarly sprightly, from the frenetic interplay of walking bass and flute on "Tsakwe" to the uplifting piano melodies of "Maraba" and deeply swung rhythms of "Ishmael."

As the album progresses into its 12 tracks of live audience performances, Ibrahim and his trio stretch out, spurred on by the crowd's applause. While there are stripped-back versions of classics from Ibrahim's discography, such as "Nisa" and "The Wedding," it is the choice of standards that makes the set stand out. Opening on a version of "In A Sentimental Mood" that sees Guyton soaring lyrically on flute, Jackson then comes to the fore with an artful solo version of "Giant Steps" before the trio combine for a nimble rendition of Thelonious Monk's "Skippy."

Across these standards, Ibrahim shines the spotlight on his soloists, using his stature to provide necessary accompaniment only. While he does play two emotive and imaginatively journeying solos on the album, what these late-career recordings ultimately show is a master stepping aside to cement the legacy of his majestic music. —*Ammar Kalia*

3: Barakat; Tsakwe; Krotoa; Maraba; Ishmael; Mindif; In A Sentimental Mood; Giant Steps; Piano Solo 1; Water From An Ancient Well; Nisa; The Wedding; Tuang Guru; Piano Solo 2; Dreamtime; Skippy; Blue Bolero (Reprise); Abdullah's Song; Mindif. (107:54)

Personnel: Abdullah Ibrahim, piano; Cleave Guyton, flute, piccolo, saxophone; Noah Jackson, cello, double bass.

Ordering info: gearboxrecords.com

Mary Halvorson
Cloudward
NONESUCH
★★★★

Even without reading guitarist Mary Halvorson's notes for the second release by her Amaryllis sextet, it's easy to discern how composition intermingled with either improvised extrapolation or mood-setting introduction as the music came together. Which is not to say the seams are showing, but rather that Halvorson has become as bold a composer/bandleader as she has been a guitarist since her first recordings more than 15 years ago.

One measure of her maturation is the way her guitar has stepped back, opening solo space for Adam O'Farrill's tart trumpet and Jacob Garchik's trombone. Another indicator is her willingness to leave holes for chance, an approach that pays glistening dividends on Tomas Fujiwara's improvised introduction to "Unscrolling," the loose interpretation of the opening to "Collapsing Mouth" by O'Farrill and vibist Patricia Brennan, and the tension-filled duet between Halvorson and bassist Nick Dunston that introduces "Ultramarine."

It's one thing to leave spaces for first-call improvisors to fill creatively, still another to layer all these elements into a creation that allows slippery tonality, dark arco slurs and ascending melody line to coexist comfortably on "Unscrolling." Naturally enough, Halvorson has found a way to share her guitar's rich palette with her bandmates yet leave them the freedom and space to insert their own voices.

When Laurie Anderson adds her treated violin, the result sounds like it's found sound that Halvorson is manipulating. In that respect, Anderson seems to be a truly integrated seventh member of this multi-hued unit. —*James Hale*

Cloudward: The Gate; The Tower; Collapsing Mouth; Unscrolling; Desiderata; Incarnadine; Tailhead; Ultramarine. (47:33)
Personnel: Mary Halvorson, guitar; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Jacob Garchik, trombone; Patricia Brennan, vibraphone; Nick Dunston, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums; Laurie Anderson, violin (6).
Ordering info: nonesuch.com

Geri Allen/ Kurt Rosenwinkel
A Lovesome Thing
MOTÉMA/HEARTCORE
★★★★★

This duet album will have you screaming at the gods after each listening. Why? Because the rapport between Geri Allen and Kurt Rosenwinkel is so exquisite that you feel robbed by the fact they weren't allowed to explore deeper into it. Five years after recording this magnificent live date (in 2012, at Paris' Jazz à la Villette), Allen succumbed to cancer.

While the bulk of the songs are jazz standards, on which many jazz musicians simply pile blazing pyrotechnics, Allen and Rosenwinkel do not fall into callow one-upmanship. Instead, they engage in dialogues that suggest a camaraderie at least a decade in the making. Often they trade lead voice on the songs so sublimely that you have to start them over to remember who initiated which melodies. And the duo proves to be just as savvy as harmonic accompanists as they do melodic improvisers.

Allen and Rosenwinkel infuse Billy Strayhorn's "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" with so much graceful exploration, the song sounds like the equivalent of two exceptional dancers partnering on an established ballet and gaining new insights into their own body language and chemistry. They use Herbie Hancock's late-'90s arrangement of "Embraceable You" to display their harmonic sophistication while also revealing their ingenuity in collaborative improvisation.

If there's any frustration, it's that the album features only one original from each: Rosenwinkel's "Simple #2" and Allen's "Open-Handed Reach." Both songs burst with beauty and are gloriously executed. If, by chance, there are any other duet recordings from them, they would be welcome additions to modern jazz's catalog. May the gods be damned. —*John Murph*

A Lovesome Thing: A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; Embraceable You; Geri's Introductions; Simple #2; Ruby, My Dear; Kurt's Introductions; Open-Handed Reach. (53:28)
Personnel: Geri Allen, piano; Kurt Rosenwinkel, guitar.
Ordering info: motema.com

Stacey Kent
Summer Me, Winter Me
NAÏVE
★★★½

On CD, Stacey Kent has an evocative but misleading voice. At 54, she invites one's imagination to sketch a precocious child whose sound hasn't quite caught up with her intelligence and sophistication. She stands in that slender, unnameable space between cabaret and jazz singer. She sings other people's songs, ignoring her generation's desire to be a singer-songwriter and write only from authentic experience, never the pretense of imagination. But she sings them like an actress who makes them her own. She is something of a throwback, but without a nugget of nostalgia in her cool reserve.

For some three decades, Kent has produced an album every couple of years, almost always made in England or Europe. That's probably why she is famous there and a bit of mystery here, and perhaps why *Summer Me, Winter Me* is getting a delayed U.S. release after its recording in France in 2019. But Kent's work has had a consistent integrity of purpose that has made her one of the classiest songbook maestros of her time.

If the preschool make-believe of "Happy Talk" seems out of register with the more adult ambiguity of the other songs, it's because Kent's purpose is to program odds-and-ends she performs but has never recorded, including originals and B-list standards. All are admirably literate and feel fresh without being particularly great. It reminds us that even the best singers who depend on others for songs face lean times. But Kent continues to thrive in her select niche. —*John McDonough*

Summer Me, Winter Me: Summer Me, Winter Me; La Valse des Lilia; Thinking About The Rain; Under Paris Skies; If You Go Away; Happy Talk; Show Me; Postcard Lovers; Corcovado; A Song That Isn't Finished Yet; Ne me quitte pas. (51:04)
Personnel: Jim Tomlinson, tenor saxophone, clarinet, flute, keyboards; Aurelie Chenille, Claire Chabert, Fabrice Planchat, Gabriel Planchat, strings; Art Hirarara, Graham Harvey (6, 8, 11), piano; Tom Hubbard, Jeremy Brown (6, 8, 11), bass; Anthony Pinciotti, Joshua Morrison (6, 8, 11), drums.
Ordering info: naiverecords.com

The Hot Box

Critics	Ammar Kalia	James Hale	John McDonough	John Murph
Abdullah Ibrahim *3*	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★½
Mary Halvorson *Cloudward*	★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★
Stacey Kent *Summer Me, Winter Me*	★★★	★★★½	★★★½	★★★½
Geri Allen/Kurt Rosenwinkel *A Lovesome Thing*	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★

Critics' Comments

Abdullah Ibrahim, *3*

The trio setting can make these live performances seem more like a showcase for flutist Cleave Guyton, but Ibrahim's long solo showcases provide welcome ballast. *—James Hale*

This summary work of familiar Ibrahim pieces focuses on his gentle, meditative touch and soft, rolling melodies. He's silent on a few faster titles ("Taskwe," "Skippy"). A calming, comforting journey linking diverse influences over a unique career. *—John McDonough*

A respectful latter-day offering from an icon — nothing more, nothing less. *—John Murph*

Mary Halvorson, *Cloudward*

Composer and guitarist Mary Halvorson returns following 2022's acclaimed albums *Amaryllis* and *Belladonna*. Reuniting with her sextet Amaryllis, the eight tracks on *Cloudward* are typically expansive and unpredictably imaginative — each taking intricate turns through artful melody and precise accompaniment, from the sludgy groove of "Desiderata" to the otherworldly screeches of "Unscrolling." *—Ammar Kalia*

An arty but delicate precision in these pieces, with a sci-fi quality that withholds certainty. A quirky charm when used with tickling restraint ("Tower"); without restraint ("The Gate") turns a bit heavy. Line between composition and improvisation is properly vague. *—John McDonough*

A magnificent soundtrack for creaky post-pandemic mayhem and cautious optimism. *—John Murph*

Stacey Kent, *Summer Me, Winter Me*

Kent's latest is a pleasant if ultimately underwhelming collection of standards and several originals. The lyrics from Nobel Prize-winning writer Kazuo Ishiguro on "Postcard Lovers" are a starry touch but the arrangements are otherwise unobtrusive and unremarkable. *—Ammar Kalia*

Quiet and confidently pitch-perfect, Kent's voice refuses to age. Inside her relatively narrow range, she sounds as youthful and purposeful as she did 30 years ago. *—James Hale*

A fan-favorite album, brimming with superb singing balanced by alluring compositions and warm arrangements. *—John Murph*

Geri Allen/Kurt Rosenwinkel, *A Lovesome Thing*

On this gem of an archival recording from a 2012 concert. Rosenwinkel's finely wrought melodic lines are a perfect match for Allen's soft harmonic touch on the keys, showcasing a burgeoning partnership that could have reached impressive heights if not for Allen's untimely death in 2017. *—Ammar Kalia*

More than sweet nostalgia, this resets Allen's high bar on how to be a sympathetic, yet emphatic, partner — whether mixing it up with Ornette Coleman or dancing sweetly, as she does here with the nimble Rosenwinkel. *—James Hale*

Waves of peaceful vibes waft like smoke rings between Allen and Rosenwinkel in these serenely paced and pensive dialogs. Proof that tranquility need not be tedious. Example: 75% of the jazz top 100 are ballads. Its artists like time to think. *—John McDonough*

Michelle Lordi
Two Moons
IMANI
★★★½

On her fourth album as a leader, singer/composer Michelle Lordi entertains a fascination with shape-shifting things: dreams, celestial bodies, natural forces, supernatural beings. It would be easy to fall into the dystopian visions that she conjures with these tunes, except that Lordi's voice itself telegraphs optimism and charm. The dissonance between this vocal presentation and the content of her tunes is mesmerizing.

Take the sentimental standard "Blue Moon," darkly reharmonized and scantly accompanied, or the folk-rock hit "Only Love Can Break Your Heart," with a marching pulse and chaotic soloing. Despite the musical disruption around her, Lordi hews faithfully to the given vocal line, a beacon in the shadow.

Through the prism of her earnest vocals, the ear bends to understand the album's dramatic musical settings differently: Pianist Orrin Evans' superb comping on Lordi's composition "Never Break" captures a subtle beauty that might otherwise go unremarked. In Caleb Wheeler Curtis' pleading sax breaks on the Broadway ballad "Haunted Heart" lie the seeds of human understanding. And bassist Eric Ravis' warm thrum on the mournful original "Sailor And The Sea" softens the edge of the tune's ominous lyrics.

At the eleventh hour the disquietude momentarily falls away with "Moon And Sand," envisioned here with a straightahead arrangement and a deliciously slow quarter-note feel. In this respite, the lyrics voice the question behind much of the album's angst: Will our love remain when the shifting ends? —*Suzanne Lorge*

Two Moons: Both; Blue Moon; Never Break; Only Love Can Break Your Heart; Close Your Eyes (intro); Close Your Eyes; Haunted Heart; Scare The Ghost; Moon And Sand; Sailor And The Sea. (47:42)
Personnel: Michelle Lordi, vocals; Orrin Evans, piano; Eric Revis, bass; Matthew Parish, bass (4–7); Nasheet Waits, drums; Caleb Wheeler Curtis, soprano saxophone (1, 6–8, 10).
Ordering info: michellelordi.bandcamp.com

Palle Mikkelborg/Jakob Bro/Marilyn Mazur
Strands: Live At The Danish Radio Concert hall
ECM
★★★

Three generations of Danish jazz musicians come together on *Strands*, a richly atmospheric live recording from February 2023 that erases any gaps in age and aesthetic tendencies between trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg, guitarist Jakob Bro and percussionist Marilyn Mazur. They've all worked together in shifting contexts, including Mikkelborg and Mazur collaborating through Miles Davis' *Aura*, which the former produced, wrote, arranged and hired the latter, leading to Mazur's place in Davis' touring band. Bro, the youngest participant, has worked with Mikkelborg, and this live recording is an outgrowth of the music they created for the 2018 quartet album *Returnings*.

Bro composed and previously recorded all six tunes, but these meditations are recast in this spacious setting, with each performance unfolding with glacial patience. Bro's arpeggios and crystalline lines carve out airy harmonies and sustained tones that hang like clouds, with Mazur's masterful touch on cymbals, bells, gongs and gently rumbling toms threading those cumulous formations with an exquisite sense of proportion. The trumpeter inhabits these spaces like a ghost, his tart, smeared lines haunting the ethereal drift of his collaborators. The trio do generate some palpable heat, tension and angularity on "Returnings" — the lone co-write, with Mikkelborg — but for the most part they conjure a highly meditative environment, deftly anticipating each other's gestures and lines with telepathic elegance. —*Peter Margasak*

Strands: Gefion; Oktober; Returnings; Strands; Youth; Lyskaster. (46:54)
Personnel: Palle Mikkelborg, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jakob Bro, guitar; Marilyn Mazur, percussion.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Cory Weeds
Home Cookin'
CELLAR MUSIC
★★★

A labor of love and follow-up to *Explosion*, the 2018 debut of Vancouver-based tenor saxophonist Weeds' little big band, *Home Cookin'* has a comfy vibe. The Canadian players in this 11-tet swing with confident warmth. Drawing on the repertoire and inclinations of Horace Silver, Thad Jones and Oliver Nelson, with arrangements contributed by co-producer Bill Coon, Michael Weiss and Fred Stride, Weeds offers a solid program, framing his hearty horn with contrapuntal section writing for brass and reeds, and a deft rhythm trio.

Everyone demonstrates easy mastery and joy in playing that gives their modernist blues life. Weeds, Townsend and company haven't set out to be revolutionaries but to meet high standards set by masters of the commonly under-esteemed jazz stage band format. They succeed.

To play tightly, mostly at brisk tempos, and make it seem easy is a fundamental jazz skill. These musicians commit themselves to the ensemble sound, attain a close blend and manage dynamics through the platforms and backgrounds for the soloists, who are adept at aiming original turns of phrase right down the mainstream middle. Pianist Gestrin is nimble, Lee holds steady and drummer Cahill makes the beat of the moment. The band even essays the wistful "Blossoms In May" without becoming mawkish.

Everything's honestly expressed and hits the intended sweet spot. For experimental or exotic cuisine, go elsewhere. For family-style, stick-to-the-ribs fulfillment, turn to *Home Cookin'*. —*Howard Mandel*

Home Cookin': Home Cookin'; Corner Kisses; Blossoms In May; Power Station; Thedia; Lullaby Of The Leaves; Metamorphosis. (39:19)
Personnel: Cory Weeds, tenor saxophone; Steve Kaldestad, alto saxophone; James Danderer, tenor saxophone; Dave Say, baritone saxophone; Brian Harding, trombone; Jim Hopson, trombone; Brad Turner, Chris Davis, trumpet; Chris Gestrin, piano; John Lee, bass; Jesse Cahill, drums.
Ordering info: coryweeds.bandcamp.com

Trombone Ensemble Nabou Claerhout
Trombone Ensemble Nabou Claerhout
W.E.R.F.
★★★½

For listeners who consider the pinnacle of trombone-led jazz to be Curtis Fuller's 1962 opus *Soul Trombone And The Jazz Clan*, or even those who worship at the throne of Fred Wesley, Nabou Claerhout's latest, titled *Trombone Ensemble Nabou Claerhout*, will pack a satisfying punch.

The trombone's expressive voice, somehow more akin to a bass clarinet than a trumpet, is quite versatile; however, in most modern jazz music, the trombone is only occasionally considered for a role in contemporary small combos. On this project, Claerhout uses a somewhat novel configuration (by 2023 standards) built around the interplay of a trombone quintet, tempered by a rhythm trio and knocks it into very contemporary, quite inventive place.

"Illusion" brings to mind the swinging horn interplay of the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, while "HUTCH" allows the rhythm section to shine tempering the track's rock-jazz fusion.

Meanwhile, tracks such as "A Day At The Huge Field With A Little House" provide a relaxing yet moody respite to more adventurous fare, sweetened by Gijs Idema's lovely guitarwork. And "Slide Unit" (the album opener) feels like a lost, deconstructed JBs track melded with a dusty 1960s World Pacific soul-jazz B-side, tempered with a dash of psychedelic electronics.

Trombone Ensemble Nabou Claerhout is a well-rounded representation of the artist's compositional and arranging prowess, a recording seemingly designed to force a reconsideration of the stalwart trombone. —*Ayana Contreras*

Trombone Ensemble Nabou Claerhout: Slide Unit; A Day At The Huge Field With A Little House; Murphy All The Way; HUTCH; A Duet For Three; Wistful; Illusion. (60:33)
Personnel: Nabou Claerhout, Peter Delannoye, Nathan Surquin, Rory Ingham, Robin Eubanks, trombone; Tobias Herzog, bass trombone; Gijs Idema, guitar; Cyrille Obermüller, double bass; Daniel Jonkers, drums.

Ordering info: werfrecords.bandcamp.com

Negative Press Project
The Victorious Sessions
RIDGEWAY
★★★½

As large-ensemble jazz albums go, *The Victorious Sessions* works. Bassist Andrew Lion and pianist Ruthie Dineen are inspired by various rhythms that coagulate into everything that makes up contemporary jazz. The band has a few albums under its belt; everything already clicks. However, these songs feel like products made from the engine that is their original compositions. The build-up necessary for these songs to really get going all before Issac Schwartz can rev up a drum solo or Lyle Link to really impress on soprano saxophone feels weirdly processed in the getting there.

In highlighting what works, this processing also highlights the moments that don't. All the goodwill earned in the lively breakdown near the end of "Squares" is suddenly squandered with its thud of an ending, like a kitten getting a water bottle spritz in the face before the Latin rhythms of "Table For Three."

Dineen's piano hypnotizes on "Chant," composed to hearken to Buddhist chanting. The ensemble's rhythm crystalizes into focus showing the full potential of what they all can do as a unit. The performances throughout *The Victorious Sessions* are top-notch, in that one must admire the craftsmanship and detail in the architecture. There's some darn good musicianship here; it's also a lot of building to a not-so-gratifying plateau.

—*Anthony Dean-Harris*

The Victorious Sessions: Victorious; Chant; Squares; Table For Three; Hexagons; Birds Of Agamon Hula; Honey. (43:16)
Personnel: Isaac Schwartz, drums; Andrew Lion, bass; Ruthie Dineen, piano; Luis Salcedo, guitar; Chris Sullivan, alto saxophone; Lyle Link, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone (2); Tony Peebles, tenor saxophone; Rafa Postel, trumpet; Ivan Arteaga, alto saxophone (1, 6), bass clarinet (4); Mia Pixley, cello (2, 4).

Ordering info: negativepressproject.bandcamp.com

Conscious Selection Byas

When saxophonist **Don Byas** moved to New York City in 1943, he had every reason to feel confident. He had already held down the tenor seat in Count Basie's widely popular band where musicians and fans absorbed his warmly enveloping tone. But Byas could not have known that he was also about to help launch a big musical transformation.

Byas' high-speed runs and seemingly effortless virtuosity across all registers inspired a wave of young bop musicians; Charlie Parker said the elder saxophonist was "playing everything there was to be played." Still, jazz histories have not been so effusive toward Byas, and his immense contributions are frequently overlooked. The inestimable 10-disc collection ***Classic Don Byas Sessions 1944–1946*** **(Mosaic; ★★★★★ 728:00)** corrects that neglect.

As Loren Schoenberg details Byas' life in the set's thorough liner notes, the musician hardly grew up as a revolutionary. Oklahoma-born in 1913, he started playing in bands as a university student. Initially focusing on alto, he switched to tenor and Art Tatum's velocity permanently turned his head around. He worked for a while in Andy Kirk's ensemble (where he connected with Mary Lou Williams) before joining Basie and then blowing away audiences in Manhattan clubs a few months before cutting the recordings collected in this set.

The initial 1944 sessions show how Byas brought his earlier large ensemble experiences to small groups. As a leader, or working next to trumpeter Hot Lips Page, Byas sometimes echoed the weighty feel of Coleman Hawkins, but he was already creating a new sound within a traditional template. This often included infusing blues riffs and standards with his characteristic fast eighth-note runs, which anticipated Parker's partnership with Dizzy Gillespie. On such tracks as "Paging Mr. Page," Byas' flights and complex harmonies always flow together. His arpeggios also reworked the tempos of familiar tunes (like "Star Dust") while ultimately enhancing the pieces' overarching moods.

While Byas' torrents set the stage for a legion of admirers on the bandstand, his unhurried approach to ballads remains just as extraordinary. In these performances, he showed how much his surprising responses to chord changes and unexpected turns enhance slower, more romantic, melodies. These performances run throughout the set but a few that stand out include sessions from the summer of 1945 that featured pianist Johnny Guarnieri and trumpeter Buck Clayton. On "Deep Purple," Guarnieri's astute chord changes provide Byas and Clayton with the right kind of space to take things in their own uncanny direction. Byas' sharp pauses lend a recurring sense of anticipation throughout a 1946 performance of "You Go To My Head."

CHARLES B. NADELL COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, SØNDERJYLLAND DENMARK; TIMME ROSENKRANTZ COLLECTION

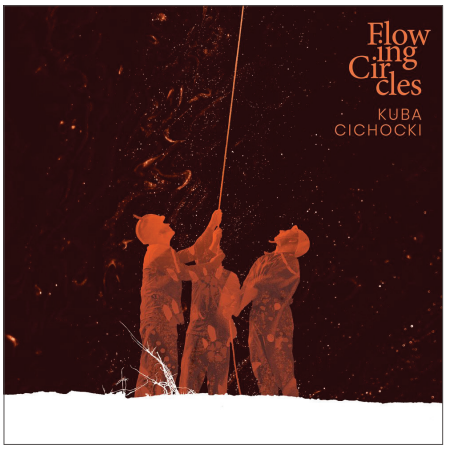
Don Byas at the Three Deuces, 1945

While a number of these recordings have been reissued previously, the sound on this set is more vibrant, especially compared to earlier Byas compilations on Savoy. But the biggest surprises are several formerly unavailable home recordings made in author Timme Rosenkrantz's apartment. As informal jams with no intention of commercial release, Byas stretched out further without being limited to five minutes on a 78-rpm single. On "Crazy Rhythm," Byas and saxophonist Lucky Thompson weave their lines alongside Thelonious Monk, who hinted at the future he was about to create.

This set also shows the numerous ways Byas excelled playing straightahead blues and delving back into swing. These included a few 1945 dates where he proved to be a match for the Kansas City singer Joe Turner and boosted the vibrant vocalists Savannah Churchill and Nita Bradley.

On the same day that Byas recorded his quartet's final sessions in 1946, he relocated to Europe, where he lived until his death in Amsterdam in 1972. Conceivably, his decades away from American jazz hubs contributed to his reputation as an unsung legend in this country. He still made great records on the continent, and also mentored and challenged such visitors as Sonny Rollins. But three years in the 1940s built his legacy, and this definitive package finally tells that story. **DB**

Ordering info: mosaicrecords.com



Kuba Cichocki
Flowing Circles
BJU
★★★½

Like an edgy, atonal second cousin of Polish keyboard virtuoso Leszek Możdżer, Polish piano marvel Kuba Cichocki has thrown his lot in more with the likes of Matthew Shipp, Misha Mengelberg, Cecil Taylor and even a bit of Keith Jarrett on this avant outing. The New York-based improviser and composer shows remarkable technical command on the herky-jerky opener, "Quirks," which deftly balances rigorously written sections with bursts of free improv.

Equally spiky is "Where The Selves Meet," which features some potent tenor blowing from Lucas Pino over drummer Colin Stranahan's free pulse and Cichocki's dissonant arpeggiating and urgent, two-fisted comping. The piece shifts mid-song to a composed, soothing string quartet section that has Cichocki improvising over the top in open-hearted, lyrical fashion, à la Jarrett, before returning to the spiky improv fireworks. This ambitious piece is, in fact, the place where Cichocki's two musical selves meet.

He straddles inside and outside aesthetics on the frantic "Blob Jump," fueled by Edward Perez's humungous, driving upright bass tones, then plays it purely in the moment on two improv numbers, the atmospheric "Nooks And Crannies" and the chugging avant-funk of "Keep Moving." Polish jazz vocalist Bogna Kicinska, a frequent Cichocki collaborator since 2012, turns in a stirring performance on "Birthday," set to a poem by Wisława Szymborka, and contributes evocative wordless vocals on "Coming Back." An eight-minute solo piano piece, "First Smile," concludes the program of "difficult listening" on an appealing note.

— Bill Milkowski

Flowing Circles: Quirks; Where the Selves Meet; Blob Jump; Nooks and Crannies; Birthday; Keep Moving; Yin Yang; Coming Back; First Smile. (48:54)
Personnel: Kuba Cichocki, piano; Lucas Pino, tenor saxophone; Brandon Seabrook, guitar; Bogna Kicinska, vocals; Edward Perez, bass; Colin Stranahan, drums; Rogerio Boccato, percussion (8); Patrick Breiner, saxophone (8); Rose Ellis, vocals (8); Leonor Falcon, Sana Nagano, violins (1, 6, 8); Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola (1, 6, 8); Brian Sanders, cello (1, 6, 8).

Ordering info: bjurecords.com

Erik Truffaz
Clap!
BLUE NOTE
★★★½

Veteran French-Swiss trumpeter Erik Truffaz spent a lot of time at (or thinking about) movies in 2023. Long a practicing believer in blending genres and artistic notions, he released his film music-adaptive project *Rollin'* early in the year, followed up by the new *Clap!* Exclamation point notwithstanding, Truffaz is in pursuit of alluring cinematic vibes vs. blasting energies.

With *Clap!*, Truffaz and band evoke assorted French films and left-of-center slices of cinematic Americana. Considering the relatively obscure filmic points of reference, the musical tapestry takes us on a journey of discovery rather than dealing with ultra-familiar movie-theme terrain.

Personalized variations on movie-mood-scaping are the goal here, from the rumbling title theme from Claude Sautet's *Les Choses de la Vie* to the gentle minor-mode trio finale of "L'Oiseau." Tapping the more adult business of Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, the rippling tenderness of George Delarue's "Theme de Camille" — just trumpet and piano lacework — contrasts the tougher stuff of the twang-guitar-fueled "L'Alpagueur" and "Requiem pour un con."

For American movie turf, Truffaz enlists vocalists Bertrand Belin, singing the hypnotic "In Heaven" from *Eraserhead*, and neo-cowpoke Stone Jack Jones, fingerpicking guitar and singing "Lonesome Cowboy," swapping the swagger of Elvis Presley's original with a coolly distracted drawl. Truffaz supplies minimal muted riffs on top, compounding the "lonesome" quotient. —*Josef Woodard*

Clap!: Les Choses de la vie; In Heaven; L'Alpagueur; Thème de Camille; Requiem pour un con; Lonesome Cowboy; Thème de Gerbier; L'Oiseau. (35:05)
Personnel: Erik Truffaz, trumpet; Marcelo Giluiani, bass; Raphael Cassin, percussion; Alexia Anerile, keyboards; Matthis Pascaud, guitar; Bertrand Belin (2), Stone Jack Jones (6), vocals.
Ordering info: bluenote.com

Gabriel Guerrero & Quantum
Equilibrio
ORIGIN
★★★★½

"Present Moment," the first track on Gabriel Guerrero & Quantum's debut album, arrives like a torrent of exultation that only on occasion recedes. Even then, there is a pleasant tumult of harmonic tension, especially when Guerrero's piano bleeds into the tantalizing sonic expositions of Seth Trachy's saxophone. The track is like the preface to a book, a harbinger of expressive music that at its base exudes a Latin-flavored rhythm. Whether in a relaxed mode, as on "Permanent Diversion, Part 1 & 2," or the more explosive "Retrogression," there's an inviting coherence, a confection of melody that harkens at first back to hard-bop, and then ahead to a distinct futuristic sound.

A repetitive cluster of thundering chords drives "No Return," and they are suffused with enough chromaticism to induce a collage of invention from each of the performers. On "Ozpal," drummer Felix Lecaros shines with a relentless, yet controlled exuberance, which is in direct contrast to the meditative pace of things on "Expectation," where Will Slater's bass is the resonant center. There are two versions of "Belong" and no matter the choice, the note-for-note blend and surge of Guerrero and Trachy is beguiling, a veritable tour de force, and another instance of the unbridled creativity they possess.

I'm not sure what *Equilibrio* means, but if it suggests a collective gusto, then that'll work. This is just the group's first shot across the bow, and this superb beginning foretells a most promising excursion into whatever soundscape they choose to inhabit.

—*Herb Boyd*

Equilibrio: Present Moment; Ozpal; Expectation; Permanent Diversion Part 1; Nunu; Belong; Retrogression; No Return; Permanent Diversion Part II; Encrucijada; Belong (Alternate). (69:21)
Personnel: Gabriel Guerrero, piano; Seth Trachy, saxophone; Will Slater, bass; Fung Chern Hwei, strings; Felix Lecaros, drums; Guillermo Barron, percussion.
Ordering info: originarts.com

Yuhan Su
Liberated Gesture
SUNNYSIDE
★★★★

Yuhan Su, who was originally a classical percussionist in her native Taiwan, moved to the U.S. in 2008 to study at Berklee and has been a resident of New York City and a jazz vibraphonist for more than a decade. On *Liberated Gesture*, her fourth album as a leader, Su is joined by pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Marty Kenney, drummer Dan Weiss and, on five of the 10 selections, altoist Caroline Davis. The album is most notable for the vibraphonist's unpredictable compositions, the originality of her playing and the consistently stimulating interplay of Su and Mitchell.

The opener, "Hi-Tech Pros And Cons," is dedicated to Su's many short-lived iPhones. It has a melody that purposely sounds a bit like a warped record with its shifting accents and speeds plus a phrase in which the vibist regularly gets "stuck" briefly. After the desolate ballad "Naked Swimmer," the intense rhythmic patterns on "Didion" (with alto and vibes playing a slow melody) is a very effective contrast. "Siren Days," which has a repeated pattern that conveys a strong sense of urgency, is about the early days of the pandemic when the constant sirens of ambulances were heard day and night.

"Liberated Gesture II, III and IV" (strange that part one is not included) evolves from sparse, gloomy piano chords to a jazz waltz, a complex rhythm (with some outstanding Mitchell piano) and finally an airy and optimistic atmosphere. The intriguing set, which rewards repeated listenings, closes with the surprisingly funky (but still adventurous) "Hassan's Fashion Magazine." —*Scott Yanow*

Liberated Gesture: Hi-Tech Pros And Cons; Character; Naked Swimmer; Didion; She Goes To A Silent War; Siren Days; Liberated Gesture II. Arc; Liberated Gesture III. Tightrope Walk; Liberated Gesture IV. Hartung's Light; Hassan's Fashion Magazine. (71:56)
Personnel: Yuhan Su, vibes; Matt Mitchell, piano; Caroline Davis, alto, poetry reading (5); Marty Kenney, bass; Dan Weiss, drums.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Christie Dashiell
Journey In Black
INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★★

Christie Dashiell is a poet, songwriter and singer with an impressive rage. She's the daughter of noted bass player Carroll Dashiell Jr. and says she was born with music in her blood. *Journey* is her second album and should solidify her position as one of today's most innovative vocalists and composers. Her original songs deal with love in its various aspects, as well as the search for personal and political freedom.

Dashiell is backed by her touring band: Allyn Johnson on keys, bass player Romeir Mendez and her brother Carroll "CV" Dashiell III on drums. The arrangements touch on jazz, R&B and soul, giving everyone an opportunity to stretch out. Dashiell's impressive yodel/scat opens "Ancestral Folk Song." The trio's slowly building improvisations add drama to the intro, before Dashiell sings the verses in her mid-range. It could be an invocation to the goddess of song, paying homage to the hope every sunrise brings.

Dashiell's melisma-drenched lead vocal is backed by her multitracked wordless harmonies on "Always Stay," a smooth a cappella love ballad. It's followed by "Influence," a free-flowing showcase for her scatting. She delivers a chorus with a potent, wordless hook and scatted verses that display of her vocal range, as she slides up and down the scale. It ends with an impressive exchange with her brother CV's drumming. Guest organ player Shedrick Mitchell adds a hint of gospel to the album closer, "Brother Sister." It's a moving prayer for Black lives, born and unborn, and the trials they confront.

—j. poet

Journey In Black: Ancestral Folk Song; Grief; How It Ends; Anyone Who Had A Heart; Always Stay; Influence; The Things You Do; Invitation; Brother Sister. (55:01)
Personnel: Christie Dashiell, vocals; Allyn Johnson, piano, Fender Rhodes, Wurlitzer, synths; Romeir Mendez, acoustic and electric bass; Carroll "CV" Dashiell III, drums; Shedrick Mitchell, organ; Marquis Hill, trumpet.

Ordering info: christiedashiell.com

Prévost/Moore/Kaiser/Golding/Brice
The Secret Handshake With Danger Volume Two
577

★★★½

All five participants of this session are versed in variants of free music, but the aesthetics forming their respective discographies are sufficiently different that it would be fair to wonder: How will their encounter sound, and will it work at all? Improvisation may be a widely applicable method, but it's not a lingua franca, and there is a vast difference between the scrupulous attunement that Eddie Prévost has exercised in AMM, Binker Golding's muscular blowing in Binker & Moses and Henry Kaiser's diverse gonzo freakouts and enthnographic investigations.

This album is the second to be issued from a session that transpired just prior to London's initial COVID lockdown. While Prévost and Moore have worked together at length, the session's most significant rapport is the one that manifests between the two guitarists. They share an affection for electronic effects, which yields some good, wiggy fun in the opening moments of "Door 4."

But the real glue is a shared appreciation for six-string dialogues that used to take place in Miles Davis' mid-'70s ensembles. While that is not a platform upon which all five musicians have stood, it is one from which the guitarists can throw ropes to the others, and once on board each can jump into the thick of things or comment on the fray from the edges. This record repays close listening for interaction and occasions of change, since some of the best moments occur when a couple of the musicians find open spaces where they can explore their commonalities and differences. One could do with a whole album of the intricate interplay that Prévost realizes with Brice, or his tumultuous dialogue with Binker late in "Door 4."

—Bill Meyer

The Secret Handshake With Danger Volume Two: Door 3; Door 4. (40:19)
Personnel: Binker Golding, saxophones; Henry Kaiser, N.O. Moore, guitar; Olie Brice, bass; Eddie Prévost, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: 577records.bandcamp.com

Tsuyoshi Yamamoto
A Shade Of Blue
EVO SOUND

★★★★

The color blue is rendered differently in Tsuyoshi Yamamoto's latest release. The outing itself is a beautifully mastered live recording from Tokyo's Gotanda Culture Center Music Hall, thanks to the innovative techniques of recording engineer Hideo Irimajir. This technical prowess allows us to really experience and feel the vibration. A trio record featuring Hiroshi Kagawa on bass and Toshio Osumi on drums, the veterans meld together to produce a sparkling debut for Evo Sound. The blues they play registers deeply. But there is also a playfulness to their play. It is a light blue.

At 75, Yamamoto offers the world a glimpse of the blues from the vantage point of long life and experience. The Japanese-born pianist is considered a legend. And this record reflects a certain mastery of the music's most potent formations. Piano trios tend to offer reflection as a mode. Close listening is often rewarded with a mood shift. That happens here. But there is more to Yamamoto's playing. His rendition of "Black Is The Color," a tune made famous by Nina Simone, brings the tune forward with an uplifting improvisatory message. The original "Speed Ball Blues" announces the record effectively, with Yamamoto soloing for almost half of the 10-minute track. This play appears to be the approach to other tunes as well. At least in this sense, the blues register deeply but in places the blues are often not thought to go: the pleasure zone. That's what makes this record, and the blues in general, such a powerful force.

—Joshua Myers

A Shade Of Blue: Speed Ball Blues Speak Low; The Way We Were; Like Someone In Love; Black Is The Color; Girl Talk; Midnight Sugar; Last Tango In Paris; Misty; Bye Bye Blackbird. (70:24)
Personnel: Tsuyoshi Yamamoto, piano; Hiroshi Kagawa, bass, Toshio Osumi, drums

Ordering info: evosound.com

Michael Dease
Swing Low
POSI-TONE
★★★½

Trombone powerhouse Michael Dease's new release is the first recording that features him on baritone saxophone. This rich, absorbing album effectively blends originals, refreshed classics and tunes by underrecognized composers.

Bracketed by a vigorous "Dancing In The Dark" and an arresting "Embraceable You," featuring Dease and bassist Boris Kozlov in intimate "conversation," *Swing Low* affirms Dease's improvisational chops and his buttery tone. It never flags.

Among the highlights: "Appreciation," an easy swinger by upcoming guitarist Ben Turner, features muted trumpet by Ingrid Jensen and Rudy Royston's snappy drumming. Dease's sinuous and jovial turn contributes to the tune's light vibe. "Melancholia," which Bill Cunliffe wrote for this album, features interlocking melody lines between a burry Dease and a pearly Hirahara. It's complex and driving but goes down easy.

"Galapagos" is a sultry Renée Rosnes work on which the players ricochet off each other, ascending higher and knottier until pianist Art Hirahara takes over, launching a solo that sets up Jensen at her most urgent. Dease finally comes in, turning in one of his most playful solos. The tune isn't done yet; Royston is all over his drum set, his touch light no matter how powerful his attack. "Galapagos" is this album's heartbeat. "Up High, Down Low," an after-hours blues by jazz clarinetist Virginia MacDonald, builds slowly, Hirahara's off-center comping ratcheting up the drama. Dease seems particularly invested here, his solo impassioned but not overbearing. Jensen's piercing horn and a growling Dease raise it to explosive heights.

—Carlo Wolff

Swing Low: Dancing In The Dark; Don't Look Back; Appreciation; Phibes' Revenge; Just Waiting; Melancholia; Galapagos; New Blues; Up High, Down Low; Julian's Tune; Embraceable You. (65:41)
Personnel: Michael Dease, baritone saxophone; Art Hirahara, piano; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; Boris Kozlov, bass; Rudy Royston, drums; Altin Sencalar, trombone (7, 8, 10).
Ordering info: posi-tone.com

Sunny Kim/Ben Monder/ Vardan Opsevian
Liminal Silence
EARSHIFT
★★★★

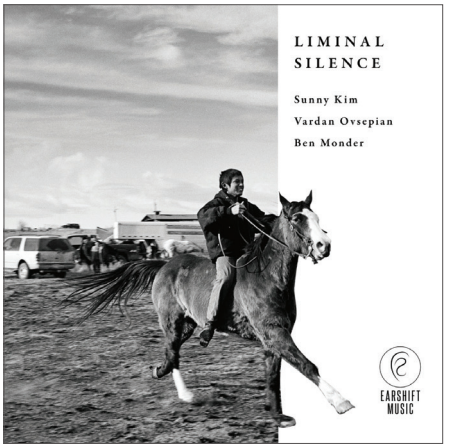
The creative synergy between vocalist Sunny Kim, pianist Vardan Ovsepian and guitarist Ben Monder is palpable from the start of *Liminal Silence*.

On the opening track, a fully improvised piece titled "The Totality Of Silence," Kim's guttural vocals float above Ovsepian's romantic chords and Monder's dark, textural notes to paint an otherworldly soundscape.

The trio flows effortlessly between ephemeral ballads, brooding rock-tinged elegies and impressionist verses. Osvepian's understated piano and Monder's frenetic arrangements are a natural foil to Kim's ethereal vocals.

On "Love (Unconfined)," Ovsepian's languorous notes complement Kim's delicate recitation of William Blake's poem. Her voice has an eerie, ruminative quality to it, which Ovsepian and Monder amplify with their angular harmonics and circular lines. The exposition on love continues on "Living Within The Ocean," where Kim recites a Rumi poem against the backdrop of Ovsepian's moody piano and Monder's mentholated guitar.

On "Fall," the trio conveys the inextricable relationship between love and loss through a poignant duet between Ovsepian's tender piano and Monder's acoustic introspection. This is a theme they explore even further in "Poland, 1948," a composition that Kim wrote after watching *Cold War*, a 2018 film about a



love story amidst impossible circumstances. A piano and voice duet, the track features Ovsepian's piano building in heat as Kim's vocalizations escalate from discordant wails to liberatory undulations. The full extent of Kim's vocal range is on display here when we contrast this song to the stripped down solo vocal track "Liminal" earlier in the record.

Kim, Ovsepian and Monder's connection is deeply spiritual, and that is most apparent in the artful way they linger in the spaces between notes.

This is a record that transcends categorization. It is an expansive yet intimate meditation that harnesses the power of silence to explore universal themes of love and loss.

—Ivana Ng

Liminal Silence: The Totality Of Silence; Love (Unconfined); Living Within The Ocean; Liminal; Ink Silence; Yerkinqn Ampele; Fall; Poland, 1948; Love (Mind's Fetters); The Curvature Of Silence. (55:55)
Personnel: Sunny Kim, voice, live processing; Vardan Ovsepian, piano, keyboards; Ben Monder, guitar.
Ordering info: sunnykimmusic.bandcamp.com

SHAWN POYNTER

Improvising violist Jessica Pavone

Orchestral Manoeuvres

Despite a long history of legendary jazz vocalists and instrumentalists pairing with orchestras and string ensembles, most string instruments other than upright bass aren't commonly associated with jazz. But then, on ***Retreat To Beauty*** **(Cellar Live; ★★★★ 52:33)**, trumpeter **Antoine Drye** launches into the Billy Strayhorn classic "Isafahan," orchestrated by the esteemed Isaac Raz for a transcendent ensemble of more than 20 musicians, and you remember the enrapturing, emotive power of strings — in any context. A strong rhythm section comprising pianist Sullivan Fortner, bassist Ben Wolfe and drummer Donald Edwards holds down the fort as Drye's buttery sound floats above, accented by shimmering strings and woodwinds. As the ensemble tackles standards like "Send In The Clowns" and originals like Drye's mellow ballad "Friend," *Retreat To Beauty* is both reminiscent and modern, and a blissful listen all the way through.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

Award-winning saxophonist/composer **Quinsin Nachoff**'s work has highlighted the largely untapped potential of string quartets within a jazz context. Alongside his collaborators in the Ethereal Trio, bassist Mark Helias and drummer Dan Weiss, and joined by two New York string quartets, Bergamot Quartet and The Rhythm Method, Nachoff's ***Stars And Constellations*** **(Adyhâropa; ★★ 53:06)** returns to a jazz trio-meets-string quartet instrumentation. Nachoff creates three tracks, featuring conversations between strings and a jazz-based improviser, to realize his sonic exploration of the mystery, mythology and science of the cosmos. Unfortunately, it's a bit of an arduous listen. While the ambition is laudable, the three tracks are each quite long and meandering, and, while *Stars And Constellations* features some innovative musical ideas and moments of thrilling interplay between string quartet and jazz combo, listeners may be left searching for cohesion and payoff in all the chaos.

Ordering info: quinsin.com

On ***Ephemeral*** **(Thelonious; ★★★ 79:00)**, New Zealand-based tenor saxophonist/bass clarinetist/composer **Dave Wilson** tackles the weighty theme of impermanence, leveraging a string quartet with members of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as well as his own sextet. Using layered grooves and textures, the nine-track album takes listeners on a journey of nostalgia, gratitude and daring. With the record's swirling, suspenseful opening track, "speak to me of yesterday and tomorrow (elusive as the dead)," Wilson explores his interconnectedness with the world around him. Meanwhile, the melancholic, drone-based "For Olivia" and "Liv's Theme" capture the bittersweetness of time's passage and of growing up. The record goes on in this manner, creating distinct sonic worlds that explore transience from several angles.

Ordering info: theloniousrecords.co.nz

In 2021, composer-violist **Jessica Pavone** came across some history that stuck with her: In the 17th century, Korean women invented the standing see-saw so they could peek over the walls of their property, into the wild they were forbidden from roaming. This inspired Pavone to search for other women-made inventions throughout time that were developed to help women get around oppressive societal norms. ***Clamor*** **(Out of Your Head; ★★★ 45:00)** is the record that resulted from that exploration. The music, written for a six-person ensemble and bassoon soloist Katherine Young, first premiered in fall 2022. It explores the neolttwigi, or the 17th-century see-saw; Nu Shu, a secret language created by Chinese women forbidden from going to school; and bloomers, created during the Victorian dress reform by Amelia Bloomer. *Clamor* oscillates between intense collective drones and transcendent moments of individual expression using time-based scoring. Often tense, *Clamor* captures the melancholy and suffocation felt by women throughout history, as well as the triumph found in subverting oppression through ingenuity. **DB**

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com

Anthony Pirog
The Nepenthe Series Vol. 1
OTHERLY LOVE
★★

The definition of the musical term "ambient," according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "music intended to serve as an unobtrusive accompaniment to other activities and characterized especially by quiet and repetitive instrumental melodies." "Nepenthe" means a drug or a drink that has the power to make one forget sorrow or trouble.

Guitarist Anthony Pirog asked a variety of guitarists to send him a four- to five-minute track of an original that they would consider ambient so he could use it for some remote interplay as part of his *Nepenthe* series. The results, which are outside of jazz, fulfill the ambient definition (although whether the word nepenthe fits will be up to the individual listener).

The set of duets (with Pirog taking "Bernal Heights" as a solo piece) features electronic ensembles that develop very slowly if at all. Most of the selections (such as "Ripples Of Light" with Nels Cline, John Frusciante's "Aurora" and "Cirrus" with Brandon Ross) are dense soundscapes with the two guitarists sounding as if they are floating through space. Luke Stewart achieves a variety of sounds on "Dense Blazing Star" by tapping his bass while Andy Summers' rockish ballad "Inflorescence" is the only original that would be considered a song.

The performances would work well as background sounds for meditation, so they fit the ambient definition. But for close listening, the results are pretty tedious and uneventful, similar to an endless outer-space trip to an unknown destination that one never reaches.

—Scott Yanow

The Nepenthe Series Vol. 1: Ripples Of Light; Aurora; Dense Blazing Star; Inflorescence; Glowing Gesture; Bernal Heights; Cirrus; Night Winds; The Eternal River. (40:12)
Personnel: Anthony Pirog, guitar, synth; Nels Cline, John Frusciante, Andy Summers, Brandon Ross, Wendy Eisenberg, Ryan Ferreira; guitar; Janet Leppin, pedal stee guitarl; Luke Stewart, bass.
Ordering info: anthony-pirog.bandcamp.com

Ron Blake
Mistaken Identity
1733 PRODUCTIONS
★★★★½

Hard to believe that it's been 15 years since Ron Blake last recorded under his own name (2008's *Shayari*). Not that he hasn't kept busy teaching at Juilliard and working in The Saturday Night Live Band, as well as appearing in the Mingus Big Band and Orchestra. But the Puerto Rican-born Emmy- and Grammy-winning saxophonist and composer has assembled a quartet with two alternating bassists — Reuben Rogers and Nat Reeves — along with drummer Kobie Watkins and guitarist-producer Bobby Broom for Broom's 1733 Productions label.

The connective thread here is everybody's hero, Sonny Rollins, with whom Broom and Kobie Watkins also played, and who wrote the invigorating "Allison." There are also nods to Duke Pearson, who wrote the opening "Is That So" (with an ear-catching opening quote from The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby"), and Benny Golson's harmonically challenging "Stablemates" with a most musical drum chorus by Watkins.

Of course, Blake doesn't sound anything like Rollins. His tone is rounder, and his improvisations are without stream-of-consciousness quotes. He's luminous on "Allison," as well as Johnny Griffin's ballad "When We Were Young," and he dances on the bossa "To Be." While he mostly plays tenor, there are a couple of features for Blake's baritone sax: a nimble dark duet with Reuben Rogers and a bright Victor Provost-penned calypso title track.

Broom is an outstanding player, composer and producer who deserves much wider recognition. Blake, too. This recording should settle the issue once and for all. —*Larry Appelbaum*

Mistaken Identity: Is That So; Allison; When We Were One; No Hype Blues; Beyond Yesterday's Tomorrows; Grace Ann; Stablemates; To Be; Mistaken Identity. (51:02)
Personnel: Ron Blake, tenor and baritone saxophone; Bobby Broom, guitar; Nat Reeves, Reuben Rogers, bass; Kobie Watkins, drums.
Ordering info: ronblakemusic.bandcamp.com

Jeremy Udden
Wishing Flower
SUNNYSIDE
★★★★

In the accompanying notes for his sixth leader album, Jeremy Udden writes, "My compositions tend towards autobiography rather than being about something specifically musical." He adds that the narrative on this recital of "quiet meditations to more energetic rockers" conflates the path of his daughter, a "city kid" from Brooklyn, and his own trajectory towards "urban adult life after growing up in ruralism."

For this episode, comprising seven originals and a '90s alt-rock cover, Udden, 45, convenes a band of mid-career masters similarly oriented to blending the dialects of rock and jazz considered from both a speculative and mainstem perspective. Each piece evokes a different environment. Five of the tracks feature Udden's pellucid alto saxophone sound, situated to these ears somewhere between Lee Konitz and Miguel Zenón not only for the tonal quality that Udden projects, but also for his steadfast determination to chase the line while sustaining thematic clarity.

On the other three, he debuts his guitaristic concept of the Lyricon Wind Synthesizer, invented not far from Udden's Massachusetts home around the time of his birth. Both contexts involve much linear counterpoint and delicate-to-skronky tonal contrast (and also blend) with guitar hero Ben Monder, whose decisions consistently enhance ensemble flow and texture while projecting intense individualism. Bassist Jorge Roeder and drummer Ziv Ravitz sustain an ever-shifting dance whose particulars aspirant practitioners of those instruments would do well to analyze and absorb.

Don't be deceived by its modest surface affect; *Wishing Flower* will repay multiple listenings. —*Ted Panken*

Wishing Flower: Flower; 1971; Lullaby; Car Radio; Pendulum; Snowflake Paradox; Prospective Retreat; Fade Into You. (46:12)
Personnel: Jeremy Udden, alto saxophone, Lyricon Wind Synthesizer; Ben Monder, electric guitar; Jorge Roeder, bass; Ziv Ravitz, drums.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Alon Nechushtan
For Those Who Cross The Seas
ESP-DISK'
★★★

If you go by title or cover art, this album appears to be dedicated to oceanic voyagers. But if you do a random scan of either of its disc-long tracks, you might suppose that it's the spaceways, not the sea lanes, that Alon Nechushtan sought to travel when he made this recording at Zebulon, a Brooklyn venue that has long since shut down. When Daniel Carter's flute wreathes the non-metric flow of William Parker and Federico Ughi at the beginning of "Cosmic Canticles," or the leader's electric keyboards raise ghostly shadows over the interplay of three whinnying horns early in "Astral Voyages," it's easy to suppose that Alon Nechushtan composed these pieces in emulation of Sun Ra.

But if you look at the credits, time is the chasm this album bridges. It was recorded in March 2006, three months before the first recording of his compositions in a studio by the band Talat. Which raises the question, why is it being issued for the first time now? The lack of annotation leaves the matter open to conjecture. On the one hand, the ensemble he gathered to play this music is undeniably impressive, and

chief among this record's virtues is the chance to hear his Vision Festival-ready horn section stretch out. On the other, there's certainly no shortage of other places to hear them play, and while their unhurried interaction is enjoyable to experience moment by moment, they don't sound like they're trying too hard to get anywhere. Nor are they likely to transport the listener the way the best albums by Test or Other Dimensions In Music might. —*Bill Meyer*

For Those Who Cross The Seas: Astral Spirits (51:08); Cosmic Canticles (44:45).
Personnel: Alon Nechushtan, keyboards; Roy Campbell, flute, trumpet; Daniel Carter, Sabir Mateen, saxophones, clarinet; William Parker, bass; Federico Ughi, drums.
Ordering info: alonnechushtan.bandcamp.com

Trespass Trio: Martin Küchen, Per Zanussi and Raymond Strid

NUNO MARTINS

A Panoply From Portugal

Clean Feed Records launched in Lisbon, Portugal, in March 2001. In the more than two decades since, the label has released somewhere in the neighborhood of 700 albums spanning an extraordinarily broad range, from free-jazz to long-form composition to records that put the "non" in "non-idiomatic improv." Four recent releases show some of what they do best.

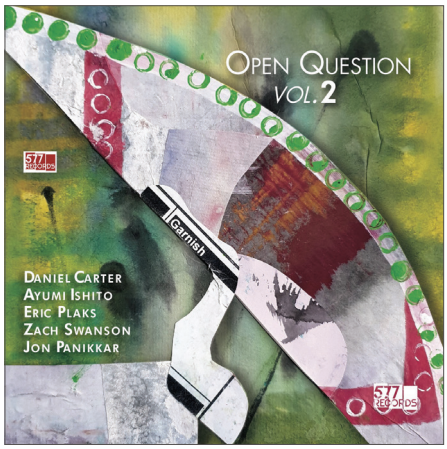
Polish pianist **Grzegorz Tarwid** has a new trio with drummer Albert Karch and bassist Max Mucha; ***Flowers*** **(★★★½ 55:10)** is their debut, and it's very much a modern piano trio album. Tarwid's playing has a sharp, percussive edge that sometimes sounds like he's hitting the keys with a chisel — they ring as if they're about to break into shards — and his melodies are often obsessively repetitive. He's also got a command of the keyboard's low end that brings to mind masters of rumble and boom like Matthew Shipp, Cecil Taylor, and the young Brazilian Amaro Freitas. Mucha and Karch don't swing as much as they thump and bounce. The drummer's kit has a rocklike boxiness, as dry as a wooden block, his cymbals sounding straight from the junkyard.

Finnish saxophonist **Mikko Innanen**, French keyboardist **Cédric Piromalli** and Danish drummer **Stefan Passborg**'s music on ***Can You Hear It?*** **(★★★★ 47:04)** is a quirky take on soul-jazz, with Piromalli's organ driving things hard and Passborg's drums providing explosive clatter and boom, more rock 'n' roll than jazz at times but never not swinging. There's more going on than just groove, though; "070520" has an Anthony Braxton-like leaping-about quality, and "Earth" may remind some listeners of John Zorn's compositions for the organ trio Simulacrum. On two pieces, the opening "Pratsch" and the penultimate "Who Nation-State Isn't," poet Lori Freedman delivers lines written by Innanen. Sometimes they're philosophical and even cutting, while other times they're surreal wordplay, extending the parameters of language the same way the instrumentalists stretch their own artistic boundaries.

Reeds player **Ned Rothenberg** is a boundary-breaking, consistently exploratory New York composer who's been working as a leader for more than 40 years. On ***Crossings Four*** **(★★★½ 52:06)**, he's joined by pianist Sylvie Courvoisier, guitarist Mary Halvorson and drummer Tomas Fujiwara for six medium-long chamber jazz pieces. The music, which includes two pieces credited to Rothenberg alone, two collaborations with Courvoisier and two four-way compositions, has an at times eerie, self-disassembling quality. Halvorson's guitar notes, as always, seem to slide away as she's playing them, while Courvoisier shifts between gentle, romantic figures and anxiously stroked strings, occasionally delivering a clang like a slammed harpsichord. Rothenberg's long notes waver and shimmer in the air, with a keening quality that seems designed to build tension rather than release it, and Fujiwara's drumming is introspective as ever, alternating between ambivalently martial beats and oddly timed, punctuating rattles.

Trespass Trio is a long-standing group led by saxophonist Martin Küchen, with Per Zanussi on bass and Raymond Strid on drums. ***Live In Oslo*** **(★★★★ 32:39)**, recorded in 2018 at the Blow Out Festival, documents their first encounter with trumpeter Susana Santos Silva. The short album consists of five tunes from their albums *Human Encore* (which featured Joe McPhee) and *The Spirit Of Pitesti*, and it's entertaining but ultimately slight. Küchen shifts between baritone and sopranino saxophones; he's either all the way down or all the way up, and his approach vacillates between a Mats Gustafsson-esque, bicep-flexing approach to bluesy melody or a post-genre parade of sputters and squeals. Silva can make a trumpet do anything she wants it to, and here she's in a mournful, almost classically free-jazz mode, teaming up with Küchen on the heads but traveling her own path otherwise. **DB**

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com



Daniel Carter & Open Question
Open Question Vol. 2
577
★★★½

Multi-horn master Daniel Carter is pivotal to New York's improvising and exploratory music scenes, with a gift for continually opening his mind to fresh collaborations. It's gratifying to find the often underacknowledged Carter recording so prolifically nowadays.

Open Question is a quintet that forms the core of the even more extreme Playfield ensemble, but the OQ approach revolves around an organic form of fusion, mostly decelerated, and largely probing space and texture. Carter plays trumpet at first, beside the electronically coated tenor saxophone of Ayumi Ishito, as "Peach Blossom" enters the fruity haze of Eric Plaks, his Fender Rhodes oscillating between the left and right speakers, his soft jangle of notes leading to the number's breakdown after only two minutes. Then, the band coaxes its way back in, tentatively, across a stalking electric bass line, uncoiling the full 15 minutes of this woozy trip.

Fusion is found here in a relaxed and open state, rather than showy and overcrowded. The miasma enfolds. "Undercover Cats" is more abstracted, with Carter also on tenor, the "pure" and "fx" saxophones forming an attractive contrast (with Ishito's sound heavily altered). Plaks is now on acoustic piano, getting freer as he solos, but also simultaneously surrounded by "almost solos" from the other four players. This thoughtful sense of flotation creates an evocative dreamworld of purposeful weaving. The funk is implied, while personal spaces are savoured. Open Question pursues a collective improvising strategy that results in melodies and rhythms, very much like instant compositions. —*Martin Longley*

Open Question Vol. 2: Peach Blossom; Undercover Cats; Joy. (38:38)

Personnel: Daniel Carter, trumpet, tenor saxophone; Ayumi Ishito, tenor saxophone, electronics; Eric Plaks, piano, Fender Rhodes; Zach Swanson, electric bass; Jon Panikkar, drums.

Ordering info: danielcarternyc.bandcamp.com

Miguel Atwood-Ferguson releases an epic solo debut.

HANNAH ARISTA

Miguel Atwood-Ferguson
Les Jardins Mystiques, Volume 1
BRAINFEEDER
★★★★★

It would be easier to list the contemporary musicians he *hasn't* played with, the instruments he *doesn't* play himself. Does the guy sleep?

This, though, is the debut solo recording by Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, a modern-day auteur whose composing style runs from jazz to ambient to classical to things that haven't got a name yet. The most striking thing about the music is how casually prodigal it can seem. The second track, "Persinette," goes to some lengths to build an atmosphere, rich and brooding and strange, and then just stops. There are many more like that, but somehow, almost miraculously, it doesn't seem wasteful but generous.

The only contemporary outfit that you might compare MA-F to is Ephemerals; there's the same mix of blissed orchestral sounds, jazzy breaks and cinematic scene-setting (no vocals, though). But the inspirations seem to fly off in other directions, too: references to gnostic Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Greek philosophy. Picking out highlights is a bit like picking out the bits of truffle from a carefully assembled dish: It misses the point. At three-and-a-half hours, this is a vast dreamscape, vouchsafed to us by one of the most exciting composers at work today. *—Brian Morton*

Les Jardins Mystiques, Volume 1: Kiseki; Persinette; Narva; Eudaimonia; Porpita; Nazo No Tenkai (Ernok); Mângata; Ano Yo; Zarra; Kairos (Amor Fati); Magnolia (Aisling); Cho Oyu; Matumaini; Zoticus; Légasi; Votivus; Querancia; Kundinyota; Dragons Of Eden; Eunoia; Znaniya (Falkor); Tzedakah; Apocrypha; Asherah; Plotinus; Kairos (Kefi); Qumran; Makaria; Kupaianaha; Taijasa; Vesta; Ziggurat; Ziya; Scar; Let The Light Shine In; Komorebi; Daydream; Dream Dance; Apotheosis; Magnolia (Astronomia nova); Moksha, Datsuzoku; Hypatia; Kuleana; Aldous; Jijivisha; Paititi; Airavata; Znaniya (Ahura Mazda); Nag Hammadi; Halcyon; Sweet Invitation. (204:00)

Personnel: Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, electric violin, reversed acoustic violin/viola/cello, reversed piano, synthesizers; Ambrose Akinmusire, Daniel Rosenboom, trumpet; Garrett Smith, tenor trombone, bass trombone; Bennie Maupin, bass clarinet; John Johnson, alto saxophone, flute; Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone; Brian Walsh, clarinet, bass clarinet; Anthony Parnther, bassoon, contrabassoon; Jamael Dean, piano; Josh Nelson, Vardan Ovsepian, piano; DOMi, Austin Peralta, Joey Dosik, keyboards; Nick Mancini, vibraphone; Jeff Parker, Marcel Camargo, electric guitar; Lara Somogyi, Liza Wallace, harp; Asher Shasho-Levy, oud; Artyom Manukyan, Peter Jacobsen, cello; Benjamin Shepherd, Trevor Ware, bass; Burnis Travis II, Benjamin Shepherd, Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner, electric bass; Gabe Noel, electric bass, bouzouki, lap steel guitar; Marcus Gilmore, JD Beck, Jamire Williams, Timothy Angulo, Deantoni Parks, Dexter Story, drums; Carlos Niño, Allakoi Peete, Pete Korpela, Andres Renteria, percussion; Benjamin Fredrick Vukelić, MIDI and synth programming.

Ordering info: brainfeedersite.com

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GRADIENT

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Jesse Dietschi, bass & compositions

"The trio's sensitive interplay and quiet creativity (even on the hotter pieces) make these atmospheric performances worthy of several close listens."
– *Downbeat Magazine* ★★★1/2

In Gradient, the Jesse Dietschi Trio travel along a continuum between modern jazz and contemporary classical chamber music, adjusting position as they navigate compositions that blend these styles.

jessedietschi.com

jonathan karrant eclectic

Jonathan Karrant's albums have hit #4 on the Billboard Jazz charts and #2 on the iTunes Jazz Charts.

He has collaborated with such artists as Dinae Schuur, Jane Monheit, Houston Person and Joe Alterman. On his most recent album Eclectic, that spans classic jazz standards and contemporary interpretations, Karrant brings a modern elegance to the timeless genre of jazz.

www.jonathankarrant.com

JOE DEL TUFO

"I put my head down and make the art that I want to make and then see what happens," says guitarist, singer and songwriter Jonah Tolchin.

JONAH TOLCHIN'S SPIRITUAL BLUES

To put a simplified spin on the musical saga of Jonah Tolchin, the singer-songwriter and nimble guitarist was going about his life when the blues came to get him.

Following a burst of unfortunate twists, including road-dogged burnout, a divorce and struggles with ADHD and a self-confessed "psychotic episode," Tolchin hit bottom, then negotiated a turnaround. He resurfaced, retrenched, remarried and strengthened his connections to the spiritual element of music and his own approach to music education.

Stylistically, the erstwhile folk/Americana-esque artist also fully committed to his early love of the blues — especially his formative obsession with such blues-rock icons as Peter Green and Mike Bloomfield and other legends. After dodging the "real thing" for years, Tolchin unabashedly channeled his blues love and lore into the new album *Dockside*, on his own new Clover Music label.

The results, starting with the apt opener "Blues With A Feeling" and including "Save Me (From Myself)" and "Nothing's Gonna Take My Blues Away," make for a powerful modern blues statement, with his cool, understated vocal style and supple and sometimes wailing way with an electric guitar.

As Tolchin explains, "I've wanted to make a blues record for a long time. This genre is the reason why I started playing music as a teenager, and it's very precious to me. It took a long time for me to feel ready to make this album, because good blues songs are inherently hard to write. It's an elusive art form from the songwriter's perspective. I can play blues guitar all day, but when it comes to actually writing lyrics — that's much harder.

"I'm not exactly sure why the timing finally worked out, but I can say that it was a long time coming." He adds, "I think Luther and Dockside had a lot to do with it."

Dockside is the name of the fabled studio in Maurice, Louisiana, where Tolchin's album was recorded. The Luther in question is Luther Dickinson, the son of blues-country royalty Jim Dickinson, member of the North Mississippi All-Stars, and the new album's co-producer and sometimes steamy guitar riff-swapper with Tolchin — as on the Buddhist-tinged "Suffering Well."

Tolchin says that Dickinson and Tolchin's bandmates Nic Coolidge and Terence Higgins (bass and drums, respectively) "created a 'safe space' for me to feel comfortable singing these songs and playing the guitar parts that I played. Luther is the best. I'm sure I'm not the first to say that he is one of the nicest, most down-to-earth dudes in the biz. He was super encouraging, and he has an energy that elevates the vibe for everyone."

Dockside's tracks traverse various byways of blues feels and sub-genres, veering into the R&B-ish "Too Far Down" (featuring soulful vocalist Chavonne Stewart) and the New Orleans/Little Feat flavor of "Mama Don't Worry." Did he have a plan to keep diversity in the album's mix?

"Not at all," he laughs. "I'm a man without a plan. But seriously, I tend to have a pretty eclectic feel on all my records. I don't really like to pick a lane: I like to bulldoze walls, lanes, genres or anything else that feels restrictive creatively. I have a rebellious spirit with that kind of thing."

His blues sensibility is a personal one, but he admits, "I would not be anywhere if it wasn't for the inspiration that I gleaned from Mike Bloomfield, Peter Green, B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Freddie King, Albert King, Albert Collins, Ronnie Earl, Hubert Sumlin, Derek Trucks, J.J Cale, Muddy Waters and so many others.

"The one exception to that was getting to play B.B. King's actual Lucille, owned by the man himself (he donated it to the Dockside studio before he passed). That was a tribute and was deeply, deeply humbling." Tolchin pays respects to B.B.'s stinging style and to his guitar on the bonus track "Lucille."

Among Tolchin's new musical endeavors and projects is his recent leap into the role of indie label owner, of the Clover Music Group. What led him into this risky business? Tolchin asserts, "I like being in control of my timeline and I like having the ability to release as much music as I want to. That was a huge factor for me. I also wanted to build it in such a way that I could help other artists get their music out into the world. I am especially interested in working with artists like myself who don't want to live life on the road. A lot of labels won't consider an artist if they aren't touring. I want to help those people out and build a digital strategy that enables folks to make a decent living from home."

Tolchin's link to spiritual practices and philosophies is stronger than ever. "For me," Tolchin says, "both playing and listening to the blues is a spiritual practice. In the past I've talked about how I think of all music that I make as blues music. That's because my underlying philosophy for music-making has to do with transforming depressive energy into something 'positive.' When I put it like that it sounds a little too dualistic. There is no 'good' or 'bad,' 'negative' or 'positive' in my realm of music-making. The blues transcends duality altogether.

"When I lean into my guitar to create sound through a string bend, all concepts fade away, and I am purely in the moment — somewhere between pain and joy. For me, that is as spiritual as it gets."

—Josef Woodard

ROSS PEDERSON & INDIVIDUALISM

With a propensity for chasing a rainbow of stylistic colors, Ross Pederson has embarked on a quest to speak as many different musical languages as possible while also keeping wide open to a variety of artistic possibilities.

For his spirited debut recording, *Identity*, the New York-based drummer/composer/producer decided to break out on his own without a net in the midst of his decade-long steady work as a sideman — gigs that included being one of the original drummers in Snarky Puppy, providing rhythmic support for saxophonist Grace Kelly and vocalist Shayna Steel, and touring as a long-term member of the Manhattan Transfer band.

"I've always been the bridesmaid but never the bride," Pederson says in a WhatsApp conversation during the Sweden stop of Manhattan Transfer's global 50th anniversary farewell tour. "That's the plight of the sideman. But I have roots in so many different kinds of music that don't appear in those gigs. It's jazz but also pop, electronica, programming and even hip-hop. I've always been looking for an outlet to express my broad musical tastes. As a result, *Identity* is a little bit of everything."

In a do-it-yourself mode, Pederson ultimately chose to not attach *Identity* to an imprint. "I do march to the beat of my own drum," he says. "I did have contacts with a few labels who offered me some good advice about how to proceed with my first record."

Since Pederson had been on Snarky Puppy's first album, he decided to have a conversation with leader Mike League about the possibility of releasing *Identity* on the band's GroundUP label. "I had a positive experience with the band, and it was overall a success," he says. "But Mike was honest with me. They were more interested in focusing GroundUP on world music — acts that were different musically from Snarky Puppy. So they passed, but then told me that I'd be better off on my own —no middle man and you can be free to curate what you want to do. I could pitch the album any way I wanted to."

Even so, the prospects were daunting. Pederson talked to other friends for advice, including Constance Hauman, who founded New York-based Isotopia Records. Others convinced him that issuing his own album was following in a trend for artists to put their music out by themselves. "I became convinced in my heart that I could do it on my own, as if to just prove it to myself that I could do it," Pederson says. "I didn't want someone to tell me how to make my music and how to do it. There would be no influence on my songs and their styles. It's a mixed bag of sorts. My guess is most labels wouldn't like that approach, anyway."

WILL ADAMY

"I do march to the beat of my own drum," says Ross Pederson, and that drum has led him to release *Identity* on his own label.

Identity encompasses Pederson's eclectic worldview. Born in Fargo, North Dakota, he started drumming in high school, where his influences ranged from Jimi Hendrix to Nirvana. His viewpoints expanded when he attended the University of North Mexico, then exploded stylistically from jazz to pop when he made his way to New York.

For the debut, two of his long-term associates were onboard. Bassist Sam Minaie, a protégé of Charlie Haden, solidified the beat. Keyboardist David Cook (known as the musical director for a number of artists, most notably Taylor Swift) painted a tapestry of colors on piano, Wurlitzer, Hammond B-3, Rhodes and synth. The core trio splashed, grooved, mused and navigated the dense spectrum of electronics. "Our relationship goes deep," says Pederson of his trio mates.

Pederson enlisted select players to buoy the sessions, including tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin. "When I moved to New York, I became highly influenced by his musical tastes," Pederson says. "He was jazz, but his sensitivity was driven by indie rock and electronics. I identified with him."

The group recorded the tracks live in the Brooklyn studio The Bunker. Pederson retreated to his home studio to add in layers of synths and percussion. The next step was to bring in another keyboardist friend, J3PO (aka Julian Pollack), to add the magic touches and further embellish the tunes. Pederson sent the tracks to L.A., where Pollack was working with Marcus Miller and Chris Bodie on their projects.

Thematically, *Identity* investigates stress release in the haunting "Anxiety" and explores the arpeggiated beauty of "Now." The B-3 featured "Contemplation" is soulful, churchy and meditative. As for the electronics-fueled "Sagittarius," Pederson says it's about his adventure-seeking birth sign.

Another guest star on *Identity* came through serendipity. To fully demonstrate that Pederson is free to record what he wants, he delivered a grooving rap song, "Bigger Than That." As he was working on the piece, he was hearing something different than jazz. He asked his wife if the song needed a rapper. She agreed and he signed on Jswiss, who improvised lyrics to the tune that has found favor on hip-hop playlists in Apple Music and Spotify.

For now, that may be the future for *Identity*. But Pederson has been getting the word out. "Social media is the biggest way I know of marketing it," he says. "Some of the tracks have made it to playlists. That increases its visibility. Indie folks, like me, do a lot of sharing. And JP30 is pushing it on his playlist. My Spotify monthly listeners have been increasing." He's also connected to the DistroKid Music Distribution digital music service that collects royalties from streaming platforms.

Pederson carries around hard copies of the album when he's touring, and he's taken on a quasi sideman gig with Japanese pop superstar Senri Oa. He sells out the Blue Note in Japan, with his fans buying *Identity*. Back home, Pederson turned heads at the official album release party at Nublu on New York's Lower East Side.

There was interest. Nothing firm, but *Identity* could be the spark for something new. Pederson says, "I was approached by a label guy who told me, when you've got your next record, let's talk." —*Dan Ouellette*

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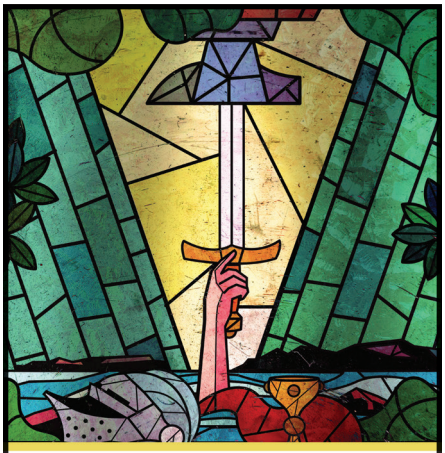

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Steven Lugerner and Ross Eustis put their experience in the non-profit world into creating Slow & Steady Records.

SLOW & STEADY GOES BEYOND JAZZ

In the land of 1001 tech startups, Steven Lugerner and Ross Eustis decided to launch a record label.

Founded in 2018 by multi-reedist Lugerner and trumpeter Eustis, San Francisco-based Slow & Steady Records has expanded from releasing albums that they and their friends had recorded to representing creative artists up and down the West Coast.

"It is a very community-oriented label, and Steven and Ross help to curate a wide variety of music," said Los Angeles-based pianist/composer Christina Galisatus, who released her debut album, *Without Night*, on S&S in early 2023. "The roster is just such a rich representation of our community and our scene," agreed double bassist/educator Joshua Thurston-Milgrom, who hails from the Bay Area and also made his album debut on S&S, in 2020 with *Thirsty Pilgrim Songs*.

Like other successful ventures, S&S was rooted in some basic research and a little external inspiration. Lugerner, who is also Stanford Jazz Workshop's director of educational and festival programming, had finished an album by his cross-genre instrumental SLUGish Ensemble and was trying to determine the best way to present it to the world.

A conversation with Hans Wendl, an ECM Records veteran who's gone on to produce albums by the likes of clarinetist Don Byron, drummer Allison Miller and the late bassist/bandleader Charlie Haden, had some honest but ultimately encouraging advice. The state of the music business was challenging even for current Wendl's clients with greater name-recognition.

"But he was encouraging me to just continue to self-release my own music," Lugerner said in a joint interview with Eustis via Zoom. "It was disappointing on one end, because I was hoping that he would just give me a list of labels and say, 'Oh, try these people.' But it was reaffirming in another way, because that's what I was just doing for years — putting out records under my own name."

Two of Lugerner's friends, pianist Richard Sears and Brass Magic leader Raffi Garabedian, also had new albums and called him to discuss the state of the industry. A record label that could provide a home for his and his friends' new music was conceived.

The next step was contacting Eustis, a then-causal acquaintance who is a member of the Jazz Mafia collective and is also associate director, digital, for SFJAZZ.

"Since Ross was a member of Brass Magic, I thought, 'Maybe instead of just continuing to put out my own music under Steven Lugerner perhaps starting a label would be a cool thing,'" he recalled. "We had a similar brain in regards to being a working musician but also being pretty organized. And we work for nonprofits and are just on a similar wavelength."

The pair met over beers and confirmed they were simpatico. In setting the goals and parameters for S&S, the co-founders looked to others for lessons and took a deliberate approach in implementing their vision. "We asked ourselves 'What are the best practices? How do you even go about releasing a record on your own? What are the things that an artist can expect?' It helped to clarify things," Eustis said.

"And being on the other side of it, I can't tell you how many artists get booked in (the SFJAZZ Center's) Joe Henderson Lab or even the big hall, and they don't have a press photo or promo kit or even a website — the basic building blocks of how they can listen to your music and book you," he continued.

"There was a theme there of friends completing records but then not knowing what to do with them," Lugerner added. "They'd self-release an album and just promote it through social media posts. And I just thought, 'It'd be cool if there was an infrastructure for hyping up the records of these people instead of the artists having to self-promote their own music constantly.'"

"We have services that we offer artists where we're checking a lot of the boxes to ensure as successful release as possible," Eustis noted. "'What is the art associated with it? What's the story behind it? How is it packaged and distributed?'"

"They provided a lot of materials with suggestions for how to go about things. But those were by no means requirements, and they ultimately left all of the creative control up to the artist," Galisatus confirmed. "I think it is common for artists to struggle a bit with 'control' with labels, and that was just so far from my experience with S&S. They were very encouraging of the ideas I had about the release and ultimately functioned as a pair of supporters."

Drummer Jason Levis' Joseph's Bones "avant-dub" project (*Nomadic Pulse/Pulse In Dub*, 2022) boasts three trombonists and three guitarists. Singer/songwriter Jimmy Kraft eschewed playing piano or saxophone to focus on vocals on his 2021 *Lilacs* EP, while trumpeter/composer Ray Larsen explored "orchestral-folk" with his 2020 *Songs To Fill The Air* release on S&S.

As for the future, S&S looks to expand the scope of its offerings.

"With Steven and me both coming from the non-profit world and seeing the power of fundraising, I think there's certainly an opportunity to grow Slow & Steady into a non-profit organization," Eustis revealed. "We have an initial donor to get us started with this, and we envision being something that provides resources to artists that need them. So a mini-endowment could be used to fund future projects, and very small percentage coming from album sales could help replenish that." —*Yoshi Kato*

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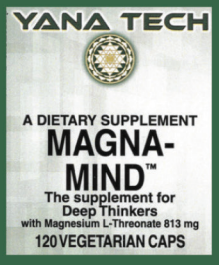

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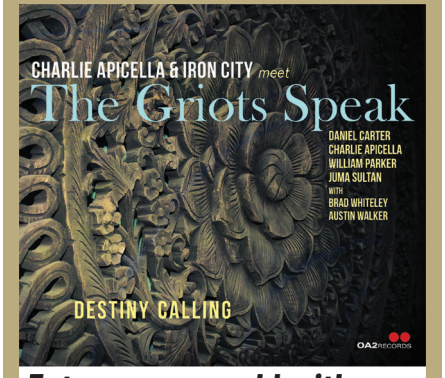

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How to Produce a Record with a Personal Sonic Signature

If you're listening to music right now, your body is probably moving. Maybe the bass is slowly thumping, the drums are undulating both fast and slow, horns blaze an array of improvised 16th notes, a piano or guitar fills in the gaps like a Greek chorus.

All these distinctive subdivisions revolve around The Big Beat, like a solar system of rhythm revolving around The One. When all these musical orbits align and vibrate your eardrums, your body can't help but move. Think Elvin Jones on the drum kit, or Parliament (landing on the Mothership) in the late 1970s. Maybe your feet tap. Or your head bangs. Or you start dancing. Every body has a unique response. Your reaction is involuntary, elemental. People crave music that swings.

As a modern record producer and mixer, I am constantly seeking to present songs that swing in a way that's original yet feels like home. In my world, the song rules over all else. A good song will tell you what to do. A great song plays itself and can sustain presentation in multiple styles or radically different arrangements. This is true even for instrumental music. Since I have always found it difficult to pick "favorites," genre-mashing is familiar territory for me.

Part of what I love about what I do is working authentically in many different styles. And while I enjoy making "pure" genre records, I'm more interested in what new kinds of combinations are possible and how those new blends will evoke something new in the listener. For "Eternity," the opening track on *Iris Nova* (2007), Mudville's second record, I combined the avant-garde piano of Mike Mills (R.E.M.) with the tablas of Karsh Kale, the saxophones of Michael Blake, beats and bass from me as well as two percussionists, all to support Marilyn Carino's delivery of her enigmatic lyrics.

To create Analog Players Society's single "Home In America" ((Ropeadope Records, 2021), featuring the legendary Brooklyn MC Masta Ace, I produced a recording session with jazz greats like Donny McCaslin and Orrin Evans, and then chopped it up in my Akai MPC 2000XL, finding a unique balance between live performance and beat-making.

My discography is filled with collaborations like these, where all the musicians bring their personalities to the music. When making a record, I always want a blend of unique group of voices to spotlight the songs at hand.

Wouldn't it be so much easier to stay pure and just focus on one style? One genre? Yes, it absolutely would. Yet many musicians I know reject genre outright as a marketing tool, unrelated to the making of art. Artists make music because they have stories to tell. The compulsion to create something new is strong. As Duke Ellington wrote in 1962: "There are simply two kinds of music, good music and the other kind."

For Ray Angry, pianist and keyboardist for the Roots and *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, and CEO of Mister Goldfinger Music Group, working beyond genre comes from a place of "always wanting to connect worlds." As someone who came up playing gospel music

in church while studying classical piano, he strives to "make inclusive music that represents [all the different parts of] me." He wants his music to have the "ring of being authentic, like [producer] J Dilla's."

To many musicians who have come up in the era of hip-hop music, a collage-like approach mixing and matching sounds and styles is intuitive and even ingrained. Over time, the lines have continued to blur with both jazz and hip-hop feeding back on each other and folding in on itself as the "sampled generation" continues to make music and younger musicians have all grown up with hip-hop. (Sometimes while he's actually cutting a track, Angry imagines what J Dilla would do with his performance later.)

Still, it's worth discussing where and what kinds of choices can be made. What are the components of the music and recording that we can alter or exchange with other ideas or song parts? I frequently look to highlight contrasts, sometime subtle, sometimes dramatic.

PAIRING DISPARATE SOUNDS

Our most important decision is the song itself, the portal through which we tell our story. Given the dramatic shifts in jazz compositional style over time, picking a song distinctive to an era will set a clear tone.

Nicolas Payton's "Cannabis Leaf Rag 1" from his 2003 album *Sonic Trance* (Warner Brothers) exemplifies this technique, juxtaposing ragtime echoes of "The Entertainer" and woodblocks with hip-hop beats and production, a composition that morphs between jazz and funk, and Payton's trumpet gluing everything together. Since jazz's earliest days, improvisors have borrowed from the popular music and sounds of the moment, and as time has progressed these different song forms and rhythms have become part of the jazz vocabulary.

Modern musicians still look to pop music for inspiration. Most of the time, these days, that means beat-based music. One could argue that the sampling of 1960s and 1970s jazz in 1990s hip-hop led to the style of J Dilla, whose signature combination of swing time and straight time in his beats is now known as "Dilla Time," a unique time feel that's used frequently in today's jazz.

In BoomBop, my new band with saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist Dayna Stephens, we seek an undiscovered path to sampling hip-hop back into jazz. Most elements of hip-hop have been folded into jazz many times: the beat, the rhythm, record scratching, samples, the sound, rappers.

So we asked ourselves, how can we use hip-hop music to find a new way to compose? We started by re-creating famous beats for inspiration, me on the MPC and Stephens on tenor saxophone using the sax melody of Pete Rock and CL Smooth's "They Reminisce Over You" (a Tom Scott sample) or DJ Mark the 45 King's "The 900 Number" as a jumping-off point for improvisation. Or Stephens using his EWI (a wind-based MIDI controller) to play the hook sound and melody from Mobb Deep's classic "Shook Ones, Pt. 2" (a slowed-down Herbie Hancock piano sample). We also use a cornerstone element of hip-hop: the unique arrangements and chord progressions that arise from the imposition of disparate or even unrelated elements.

Stephens is "attracted to working with pre-existing works of art, and hip-hop opens doors to endless possibilities." This is actually no different than our golden age jazz heroes adapting the Tin Pan Alley hits of the day as their vehicles of exploration and improvisation. For BoomBop, Stephens and I have been searching for ways to infuse drum programming and sampling with improvisation, using the classic samples, sounds and songs of hip-hop to tell a new story. Ultimately, though, Stephens just wants to "make some music that feels good."

I frequently look to highlight contrasts, sometime subtle, sometimes dramatic.

Another way to approach a song is to take a conventional jazz instrumentation and mesh it with a seemingly incongruous style. In his quest to "seek a sound world that has never existed before," tenor and soprano saxophonist Arun Luthra (and his Konnakol Jazz Project) deftly blend together a traditional jazz quartet with konnakol, the Carnatic (South Indian classical) tradition of vocalized rhythms. Son of an Indian father and an English-Francophile mother, Luthra is rooted in multiple traditions.

As producer of his forthcoming record, I am helping to navigate the right balance between Luthra's ancestry and his life-long immersion in American jazz. We know we can bring in new listeners who may have felt excluded, not having heard their stories represented in jazz before. In discovering something familiar, or ancestral, perhaps, they will think: "This music is for me too." Luthra wants his records to be a gateway for unfamiliar listeners.

Other recordings I've worked on with similar principles include composer/pianist Emilio Solla's Grammy-nominated *Second Half* (2014), a beautiful combination of large-ensemble jazz with Argentinian tango; *The Transcendental* (2024, Steeplechase), tenor saxophonist Michael Eaton and pianist Nicki Adams' forthcoming duo record, which deftly combines originals and jazz standards with a distinctly classical feel; and drummer Johnbern Thomas' *Mesi, Merci, Thank You, Gracias* (2017), a combination of New York hard-bop and danceable Haitian kompa rhythms featuring Aaron Goldberg on piano.

My forthcoming work with saxophonist-trumpeter Caleb Wheeler Curtis takes the idea of pairing disparate sounds further by recording Curtis playing unaccompanied standards, and then using synthesizers and sound design to accompany the saxophone. A radical setting like this is a great way to recontextualize "Body And Soul" or "Chelsea Bridge," for example. "For me," Curtis explains, "the sound clarifies the intention of the music: the drama, the intensity, the intimacy." Unexpected sonics draw the listener in, beckoning them to take the journey.

INSTRUMENTATION

Fundamentally, your recording will be defined by the sounds of instruments played by master musicians. Maintaining some acoustic instrumentation is a safe way to keep the listener's ears rooted in jazz. Horns like the alto sax, tenor sax and trumpet are all iconic jazz instruments, as is the upright bass. So conversely, avoiding these instruments, or using more recent inventions like synthesizers, the EWI or samplers, drum machines or turntables (actually old tech!) will inject your recording with a different vibe. Of course, every instrument is an extension of the person playing it, so the musi-

Rubin espouses a musical philosophy of "keeping the body movin' by telling a good story."

cians you choose can drive your sound choices as much as the instrument itself.

Pianist Kris Davis says having a deep connection with her bandmates is as important as which instrument they play. She needs the musicians to "care about the idea of, like, jumping off a cliff together… [to be] willing to engage in discovery and taking risks and exploring new sounds." Her 2019 record *Diatom Ribbons* (Pyroclastic Records) and its 2023 counterpart *Diatom Ribbons Live At The Village Vanguard* (Pyroclastic Records) illustrates this approach, melding together two different jazz communities in which she's involved. The practice of choosing your sound palette by choosing your band has deep roots.

In fact, Duke Ellington would write the individual player's name on each chart, rather than just the instrument they were playing. The part was written specifically for, say, Johnny Hodges, or Cat Anderson, not a generic "Alto Sax I" or "Trumpet I."

On *Plumb* (JMI Recordings, 2023), veteran avant-garde tenor saxophonist David Murray, Angry and drummer/DJ Questlove walked into the studio without a plan. In a series of all-improvised first takes with no overdubs, the record features Angry on a wide palette of synthesizers, and showcases the versatile Roots drummer in a non-hip-hop context. The result is music you could call jazz, although the record's sound evokes so much more.

Saxophonist and composer Yann Jankielewicz (Tony Allen) wasn't consciously thinking about genre-mashing while writing songs for *Keep It Simple*, his forthcoming record combining jazz, afrobeat and moody '80s synths, which I co-produced. (Think Eddie Harris meets Fela meets Bernie Worrell.) From his Paris apartment, he envisioned the music being played in Brooklyn by American musicians.

"I was thinking about the journey, the unknown, the surprise. I had to have the confidence in myself to hire these great New York musicians" (keyboardist Jason Lindner and drummer-vocalist-keyboardist Josh Dion), Jankielewicz says. But he was also thinking deeply about the sound of the recording. "I think about the way sound sounds, and I compose with the recording in mind." We followed his outline as we tracked the band and then handed it over to mixer Tchad Blake to find the right balance of clarity and grit.

SONIC AESTHETICS

The sound of the recording presents another area of opportunity to convey emotion to the listener. Different eras of music have different sonic aesthetics, defined by the recording technology of the time as much as by the music itself. Think of the orchestral sound of large studios in the '50s and '60s, the experimentation sparked by introduction of stereo and multitrack recording in the late 1960s, or the dry drums and lush production of the 1970s, for examples. Or even reach back to the band-limited sounds of the 1930s (referenced in "Cannabis Leaf Rag 1").

Like many jazz-based artists, Davis spends a lot of time thinking about how her records will sound before she enters the studio. With much thought given to showcasing her band members, she composes the songs in advance, but is careful to leave a lot of room to improvise.

"I like variety, different kinds of grooves, tempos, different forms, different approaches, different kinds of challenges for the players. The yin and yang of things," she says. On the *Diatom Ribbons* records, allowing veteran producer/engineer/mixer Ron Saint Germain to highlight certain moments in the mix with sound or effects was important as well. "He's elevating those moments for the listener. The experience of [momentary] otherworldly sounds [or dramatic panning] brings in the listener in a cool way."

On *Freebird,* by Walking Distance feat. Jason Moran (Sunnyside, 2018), the band (Curtis, tenor saxophonist Kenny Pexton, bassist Adam Cotè and drummer Shawn Baltazor) and I took changing the sonic presentations of a traditional jazz ensemble to an extreme, making each song its own world. On "Pexterity," the band members huddled around a single microphone. On "Cheat Sheet," everyone was isolated. "Bigment" was arranged like a three-part story, with dramatic recasting for each section, along with overdubs. By changing the setups frequently, the well-rehearsed band was able to explore their own music with fresh perspective.

Although 21st-century musicians may have an overwhelming array of choices, the goal should remain "keeping the body movin' by telling a good story." In the era of social media, Black American music's influence reaches far and wide across the globe and back again. Music discovery is easier than ever and artists who have never met can influence each other from afar. Being a careful listener and student of music history is the surest way to creating art that references earlier times while offering a fresh perspective. As Angry describes it, music is "like a library and you're just checking out books, and those books are ideas, and those ideas turns into songs." Simple as that! **DB**

Whether he's mashing up hip-hop and jazz with Masta Ace and Donny McCaslin, playing rock 'n' roll with Marshall Crenshaw or producing Peter Bernstein's solo jazz guitar recordings, Grammy-nominated producer/mixer/bassist Ben Rubin (aka Benny Cha Cha) is known for making records that are pure or genre-bending or both. A seven-time pick as a Rising Star Producer in the DownBeat International Critics Poll, Rubin has also played the Newport Jazz Festival with Dred Scott Trio, remixed Killah Priest and Karsh Kale, and won an Independent Music Award with his band Mudville. He has more than 100 recording credits to his name, many for the labels SmallsLive and Ropeadope Records. Visit him online at benrubin.com.

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

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CHARLIE WEINMANN

Pete Min has discovered that more than a few jazz musicians are coming to his Lucy's Meat Market studio space for a different recording experience.

L.A. Studio Owner Pete Min's 'Hidden Gems'

Of the more than 400 neighborhoods sprawling across greater Los Angeles, Eagle Rock might be the most neighborly. The winding residential streets and quaint mom-and-pop shops helps one forget it's only minutes from the gaudy glitz of Hollywood or the hipster enclave of Highland Park. On the corner of one of those streets used to be one of those shops, before Pete Min purchased the site and built a recording studio, naming it Lucy's Meat Market in homage to its predecessor.

Unlike the weathered storefront of its namesake, there is no discernible business entrance, only a single gate between tall hedges off of a side street. Once inside, it's still a mystery as to where to go: a chic modern structure to the left, a more utilitarian one to the right. Eventually Min popped his head out a door from the right side, greeting this bewildered writer with a smile. "As you know, in L.A.," he remarked as he led us into the control room through a kitchen replete with a refrigerator, stove and Steinway upright piano, "everything is hidden."

Min could have been referring to a lesser-known facet of the Los Angeles music scene: a growing number of musicians who play or are familiar with jazz, who have carved out a successful career while seeking inventive ways to apply their craft. And they have found a rare gem in this unassuming, disarmingly friendly audio engineer and producer.

"If Pete acted way more aloof and had a giant beard, he would be super famous," said Kaveh Rastegar, once best known as the bassist for the neo-fusion band Kneebody, before playing and recording with the likes of John Legend, Sia, Ringo Starr and Beck. He and Min met through a mutual friend, producer Keefus Ciancia, who brought Rastegar to Min's previous studio in Sherman Oaks to record a song they had co-written with Meshell Ndegeocello.

"[Pete] was easygoing," remembered Rastegar of their first encounter, "but also with a real kind of fire to make things happen and to be a part of a music scene."

Pete Min was born in Chicago and grew up in New Jersey, eventually finding himself in New York, playing guitar for Blondie's lead singer Debbie Harry and other rock artists, before delving deeper into recording. Eventually, Min coveted a change of scenery,

relocating to California in 2006. He built and moved into his new Eagle Rock digs in 2014.

Rastegar introduced Min to other crossover jazz players: pianist and organist Larry Goldings, guitarist Tim Young and drummer Jay Bellarose, who plays a weekly jazz gig with guitarist Jeff Parker and bassist Anna Butterss (whenever she isn't touring with singer Phoebe Bridgers). Butterss became one of the first to record and be produced by Min under his new label, Colorfield.

"Anna Butterss, one of my closest friends, she was telling me about the record that she was making," said saxophonist Daniel Rotem, who had recorded with Min on a film soundtrack and would occasionally stop by to hear other friends' sessions. "Soon after that," Rotem continued, "I got a [message] from Pete, basically asking, 'Hey, do you wanna make a record for my label?' And I said, of course."

The trail of artists who have worked with Min ventures inexorably from the pop and rock side to the burgeoning modern jazz renaissance in Los Angeles. To better accommodate what he calls the "jazzers," Min is building an adjacent isolation wing for his other Steinway, a beautiful rebuilt century-old grand. "I want to be able to do that kind of thing," he said, "because jazz records are two days, and it's so fun because they just go out and they play two or three takes for each song. … I sound good because they sound good. It's easy to make [those] people sound good."

And yet, Min has discovered that more than a few jazz musicians are coming to him for a different recording experience. "When Daniel [Rotem] came in, I would get him on keyboards, I got him on percussion, I got him on drum machine, all these different instruments, right?" he said. "And those are affairs where they take like 15 days, because it's a production record."

Rotem remembers Min asking him to play a balafon, a West African gourd-resonated xylophone. "I sat on the ground and started playing it," he said. "Most of the songs would start with some sort of improvisation to kind of get an initial idea going."

"I told Daniel, don't bring any music in, we're just going to do everything here," Min recalled. "So, he might do some percussion. I'll flip it onto the tape deck and go down an octave, and then flip that back into Pro Tools and be like, play to that. The whole ethos is that I don't want people to think about stuff. I don't want to do things with intent. You can get out of the headspace of thinking about it, and you're just kind of reacting … you let things happen. Sometimes those things are better than things that you intend." The unintentional is Min's intention for his fledging label.

Min acknowledged that this process is not for everybody. "I've often thought there was kind of this interesting dichotomy for jazz musicians," he mused, "particularly because everything they do is improvised, and yet when it comes time to make an album, they have a very fixated way of putting the music together. They're almost weirdly very conservative."

He continued, "I get that for the performance thing, I totally get it, and I like doing those kinds of records, but I also think … let's make a Pink Floyd jazz record, where it doesn't have to be that [same thing], it can be whatever."

"The approach to making music on the spot is so closely related to what we do and yet in terms of making records, so rare," Rotem said of his experience with Min. "There's nothing to hide behind because you're really creating in the moment, which I found to be really refreshing, and also just kind of liberating." The Israeli-born saxophonist's resultant 2023 album, *Wave Nature* (Colorfield), features many moments of exploratory sound-making, as rich in textural beauty as it is gripping in the element of surprise.

"It reminds me of things that I've observed working with Wayne [Shorter] and Herbie [Hancock], approaching and making music like a child, that ingrained curiosity and joy of finding how things could sound," said Rotem, who came to Los Angeles in 2014 for the prestigious Thelonious Monk (now Herbie Hancock) Institute of Jazz, allowing him rare access to Hancock and Shorter.

Rotem also invited some of his friends to play on a few tracks: Butterss, drummers Christian Euman and Jonathan Pinson, guitarist Anthony Wilson and vocalist (and longtime partner) Erin Bentlage. Almost all of them have already done or are planning their own solo projects with Min, adding to an impressive list of jazz clients in and out of Los Angeles: Ben Wendel, Mark Giuliana, Donny McCaslin and others.

Rastegar recently collaborated with Goldings and drummer Abe Rounds at Lucy's Meat Market to record a rather funky trio album, *Better* (2023). "The opportunity to really explore within the environment of analog keyboards is rare for me, especially in the context of a band," Goldings said via email regarding the album. "Playing synths and Rhodes, etc., were a big part of my childhood musical explorations, and this opportunity brought me back to a very special place in my heart."

Rastegar suggests that Min makes sense for forward-thinking jazz artists because he's employing older analog technology in the service of more recent "in the box" recording techniques. "We live in that day and age where so much incredible music is being made without recording any instruments," he noted. "But [Pete] made a hard bet towards the analog … and it's really paying off in the best way."

In the control room, Min put his hand on a 1977 Neve 8058 console, which he recently purchased from a larger studio that had been recording a lot of hip-hop. "The hip-hop guys, they just want SSL (Solid State Logic), so for them, it was dead weight," he said of his new, old centerpiece for his modern analog studio, stacked with other vintage items: a treasure trove of Neuman, Royer, RCA, Schoeps, Beyer and many other mics; more than 20 amps by Fender, Gibson, Martin and others; 24 acoustic-electric pianos, organs, synths; 34 guitars and basses; and myriad mic preamps, compressors, reverbs, effects pedals, drums and percussion.

"It's like I'm a garbage picker," he joked, referring more to the random sounds his artists come up with in the studio. "It's our garbage, but in a way, I'm kind of like, I'll take your throwaways and figure out how we can make things out of what you think are throwaways."

Min has proved he can make found art masterpieces out of those throwaway items, fitting in a city where all the gems are hidden.

DB

Visit Pete Min and Lucy's Meat Market online at petemin.com.

COURTESY MIN XIAO-FEN

Min Xiao-Fen's pipa solo presents her personal take on the blues.

Min Xiao-Fen's Pipa Solo on 'Hatha'

You can really get into a slow minor blues on the Chinese pipa. Yes, you read that right: the pipa, a four-string lute-like instrument that's been around in various forms for more than a millennium, and Min Xiao-Fen used it to improvise on "Hatha," an E minor blues groove recorded by her and guitarist Rez Abbasi on Min's 2021 album *White Lotus* (Outside in Music).

There doesn't seem to be a prepared melody, just two musicians having a conversation, and since we have the space to present Min's entire improvisation, we did. I've treated the notation like guitar notation, presenting it in treble clef but an octave higher than sounding.

I've also written it in 12/8. Abbasi plays it like a shuffle, which might create the expectation of notating it in 4/4, except the manner in which Min plays against this makes that next to impossible (or at least highly inconvenient for the reader as well as the transcriptionist). Notice how often she accents what would be the middle part of the triplet if this were presented in 4/4.

From her very first chord hit toward the end of the second bar through the syncopated rhythms in measures 37–38, she spends just as much time accenting the middle part of the triplet as anywhere else. So although Abbasi is doing a stellar job of making this sound like a shuffle, Min is disrupting that, which is a big part of what's so compelling about her solo.

Also, she sometimes plays 16th-note triplets (bars 3, 5, 12, 14–16, 25–28, 30–31, 33–34, 39 and 43). If this had been written in 4/4, we'd have a triplet inside a triplet, which would be very cumbersome to read (not to imply that this is a simple read, just easier than if presented in 4/4). She almost always uses this rhythm for repeated notes or chords, so it's somewhat of a flourish to decorate lines. The exceptions are in measures 30 and 33, where it's used as more of a trill.

Then there are the places where Min plays what would seem to be swing eighths, playing the first and last part of the triplet (such as the second half of bar 5, the end of bar 6, measure 7 and to a large degree all of measures 11 and 22, for instance), which helps reinforce the shuffle groove. But at other points she will "reverse the swing," playing the first two parts of the triplet instead (the C to B at the end of bar 3 and beginning of 4, and the double stops from the middle of bar 20 through the next measure, among other places).

This serves more to disrupt the sense of a 4/4 shuffle. There are even instances where she juxtaposes them against one another, for example, bars 7 into 8 and measure 10. She even does the same trick with 16th notes in the middle of bar 33. So it's sometimes a blues shuffle and sometimes not, and Min can switch in a moment. (She even goes the other way in measure 19, playing dotted eighths that create the feel of a straight-eighth 4/4. She's got some serious rhythmic skills.)

An aspect I particularly enjoy about this improvisation is the juxtaposition of "inside"

and "outside" elements. It's clearly in E minor, and Min even plays some E minor triads (she both starts and ends her solo with these). On occasion she incorporates the flat five, the "blue note" that is often considered the element that brings out the quality of the blues. It first appears in bar 20, where it is first used to decorate the fourth, which is fairly typical of blues.

But later in that measure the line is harmonized with notes a fourth down. This gives us an E and F natural under the A and B♭. F is the flat ninth, and Min has played a significant amount of F#s previous to this. The flat ninth does happen in some kinds of blues, but those tend to be more modern. Using the flat ninth and natural ninth in the same improvisation makes it less sound less modal.

In the next measure the plot gets deeper: Min uses the flat five to approach the fifth, which is also a common blues move, but here she harmonizes it a fourth up, which creates a major seventh resolving to the root. This is somewhat outside blues territory, but since we had the fourth and flat seventh in the previous beat, it does create a more jazz leaning chromatic line.

Which is all fine until Min brings this idea back in measure 32. We have the same blue note harmonized with the major seventh above it, but played over a low D, the flat seventh. Stacking these notes on an E minor vamp should sound very dissonant, and it does.

Min is musical enough to know that you don't play "inside" all the time, at least not if you want a certain type of drama in your music. The question is how much conflict can you handle, and Min is demonstrating that she can shoulder quite a bit. She also knows when you go this far "outside" it can be satisfying to come back "inside," and so in bar 34 she returns to E minor scales.

There's also the C natural, which Min typically uses to get to and from the fifth (B natural). Though quite at home in E aeolian, this pitch isn't very blues sounding, and brings in a more classical texture. Though when she bends to it (as in measure 8) it starts to sound more "Eastern."

And though Min uses some elements of the blues such as pitch bends and the flat fifth, she never plays a single pentatonic lick. There are places where she come close, such as bar 9, but then she adds the ninth in the subsequent measure and it becomes modal again. The same thing happens in bars 18–19. We're teased as she gets closer to the blues but then she diverts our ears away.

I find this refreshing, hearing the blues from a different angle. It's an approach to blues playing that could only be created by someone who came up in a different culture. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass, titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

Microphone Boom-Times!

New & Affordable Gear Amounts to Big Opportunities for Musicians & Engineers

The microphone market is currently in the midst of a boom time, as manufacturers continue to innovate with products designed to be highly functional, easy to use and affordable. By embracing new technologies and materials, mic-makers have developed a wide variety of new gear, offering everything from latency-free USB mics, better clones of classic vintage mics and more options for everyone from the home studio recordist to the seasoned audio professional. Here we present some notable products from the past year that amount to big opportunities for musicians and engineers in the market for micorphones and microphone-related gear.

The **AKG Ara** two-pattern USB microphone lets podcasters and musicians capture pro-quality, high-resolution sound right from their desktops. Whether you're streaming or recording, you can capture audio at 24-bit, 96kHz resolution for crystal-clear speech clarity and strong vocal and instrument tracks. Ara's dual pickup patterns let you focus on a single voice or instrument or everyone in the room. Choose the directional Front (cardioid) pattern to focus on sound directly in front of the mic while rejecting sound from other sides, or use the Front + Back (omni) pattern to pick up sounds all around the mic, such as multiple speakers or a group of performers. Use Ara on a desktop, boom, stand or even on the go, with an optional adapter and your mobile device. It's plug-and-play simple, thanks to USB connectivity and class-compliant drivers.

Monheim Microphones' latest tube condenser microphone, the **Monheim Royalty**, features a 14-karat gold-plated grill housing and bot- tom cap, and a body complete with custom purple paint to create an homage to Prince's "Purple Rain." In addition to its individually tested custom K67 capsule and EF86 tube, the Royalty's custom-made grill showcases Monheim's commitment to acoustic development. Using a metal fiber weaving process, the microphone grill is designed to be an effective yet transparent pop filter to protect the microphone's custom K67 capsule. The Monheim Royalty is made to record vocals, acoustic guitars, trumpets, trombones, saxophones, clarinets, drum overheads and other acoustic instruments, and it offers a vintage sound with modern fullness and air. With rich low-end and smooth, extended top-end, Royalty is the paragon of Monheim Microphones' lineage of condenser microphones. Inspired by the classic 67 sound, and featuring an individually tested K67-style capsule coupled with a premium EF86 tube, vocalists will sound even more full-bodied, and saxophone sand acoustic guitars will sparkle with lush sonics. The visual homage to The Purple One is completed with a custom candy-coated body paint matched with a 14-karat gold-plated head basket and bottom cap.

In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, **Royer Labs** is has debuted two ribbon microphones. **The R-121 25th Anniversary Distressed Rose** and **R-10 25th Anniversary Hot Rod** offer all the performance attributes that make the R-121 Ribbon Microphone and the R-10 Studio/Live Ribbon Microphone popular, but with unique finishes that distinguish these two new models, and a new transformer and performance spec given to the R-10. The R-10 25th Anniversary Hot Rod is a passive mono ribbon microphone designed for use in the studio and on live stages. Hand-built in the company's Burbank, California, factory, the R-10 25th Anniversary Hot Rod handles SPLs of up to 160dB at 1kHz. The limited- edition R-121 25th Anniversary Distressed Rose offers all the characteristics of the original R-121 Ribbon Microphone. It has high SPL handling and gives natural-sounding reproductions of instruments from electric guitar, brass and drums to piano, cello and violin.

Alctron Audio's CU38 high-performance USB condenser microphone can be used on most platforms with any major recording software, thanks to its class-compliant USB output. A 3.5-millimeter headphone output provides nearly zero-latency monitoring and, by rotating

the volume knob, the audio will be routed directly.

MXL Microphones' Revelation Mini FET microphone is inspired by the brand's Revelation and Revelation II tube mics. The Revelation Mini FET has the same warmth of a tube mic but is built around a FET circuit with a smaller footprint. The compact, large-diaphragm condenser microphone utilizes a premium 32-millimeter capsule combined with a very low-noise circuit. This design results in recordings with less hum and more musical information, setting the performance apart from what's possible with basic entry-level microphones. The inclusion of a three-stage pad provides the flexibility needed for recording high-SPL sources.

The **C98 Cardioid Condenser Gooseneck Instrument Microphone** from **CAD Audio** is designed for the capture and reinforcement of drum sets and other acoustic percussive instruments. The cardioid polar pattern provides off-axis rejection that's for on-stage clarity. The streamlined gooseneck design and included drum rim mount provide flexibility for mounting in tight spaces and eliminate the need for mic stands, freeing up valuable stage space. Low noise and high SPL provide clean and clear sound reproduction.

IK Multimedia's iRig Stream Mic Pro combines a professional multi-pattern condenser microphone and 24-bit, 96kHz audio interface for iPhone, iPad, Android, Mac and PC into a single, portable solution. With dual mic capsules, the iRig Stream Mic Pro offers selectable cardioid, figure-8, omnidirectional or stereo pickup patterns. These patterns range from noise-rejecting to immersive audio, so whether it's recording a singer, instrument or ensemble, the sound signal stays crisp, clear and detailed with adjustable gain and selectable high-pass filter.

Samson's HighRise Mono Active Mic Booster is designed to boost and enhance the signal of low-output microphones. It provides a crisp, ultra-clean signal in a robust and small package. The HighRise is a compact, mono signal booster, providing up to +30dB of transparent gain for connecting low-output microphones to mixers, audio interfaces and preamps. Whether a user is capturing spoken word for a podcast or livestream, recording in the studio or performing on stage, the HighRise provides more headroom to ensure an ultra-clean microphone signal. The HighRise works with almost any dynamic or passive ribbon microphone. In situations with low-output mics, a quiet source or where the mic preamp lacks sufficient gain, the HighRise boosts the signal level, maintaining the natural sound of the microphone. The HighRise Mono Active Mic Booster is a pre-preamp that's connected inline between a microphone and a preamp, audio interface or mixer. The unit runs off of standard phantom power, but it won't pass the phantom power to the microphone. This ensures the microphone stays safe, whether it's a dynamic mic or ribbon microphone. The 14-gauge steel enclosure protects the electronics, and it's built to withstand up to the abuse on stage and on the road.

On-Stage's MY440 Shock Mount for Studio Mics helps engineers, musicians and vocal performers create more professional-sounding recordings. It provides elastic suspension that isolates microphones from external causes of rumble. The sturdy adapter mounts to standard mic stands and booms, while the suspended clamp securely holds a wide range of large-diaphragm condenser mics. A steel mounting socket provides stable, dependable mic support. The MY440's clamp angle adjusts and locks in place with a tightening knob for precise mic positioning. The EVA lining on the clamp protects the microphone's finish and guards against scratches while delivering a nonslip grip for reliable support.

Warm Audio's WA-MPX and **WA-2MPX** single- and dual-channel tube microphone preamps recreate a historic tape-machine tube preamp known for its analog warmth and 90dB oftube gain. During the golden era of tape recording, this style of vintage tube preamp became the signature sound in the signal chain of many hit recordings of the day — a timeless sound that continues to be pursued by elite audio engineers. With premium components, true-to-original circuit design and selectable tape saturation, the WA-MPX reproduces all the analog tone of the original to bring vintage warmth and color to your sound. To accurately deliver the original tube character, the WA-MPX is hand-assembled with three premium tubes per channel paired with custom-wound true-to-spec transformers made in partnership with CineMag. **DB**

1. Speaker Wedge Stands

Gator Frameworks' new angled studio monitor/speaker wedge stands provide an optimal listening experience while being mindful of compact setups. Offered as a pair, the wedge stands are ideal for small- to medium-sized desktop, bookshelf and computer speakers or studio monitors without occupying too much space on workstation surfaces. Each speaker stand is designed with a tilt lip that keeps the speaker in place and ensures that it remains secure on the stand.

More info: gatorco.com

2. Float Recording

Featuring 96kHz/32-bit float recording technology, a 2.4-inch color touchscreen, two XLR inputs and dual built-in microphones with switchable A-B and X-Y patterns, the Tascam Portacapture X6 Float Portable Audio Recorder is ideal for videographers, sound designers and musicians in search of high-quality stereo mix recordings for smaller-scale production projects. The Portacapture X6 features an intuitive user interface that offers multiple recording modes for different scenarios.

More info: tascam.com

3. Workflow-Focused Interface

The iD24 from Audient is a 10-in/14-out audio interface that slots neatly between the brand's iD14 and the more recently launched iD44 in terms of functionality. The iD24 features two Audient Console Mic Preamps, which are the same discrete circuit design as those found in the flagship ASP8024-HE console. Maintaining a focus on workflow, any of the advanced monitoring features — including speaker select, talkback, polarity invert and mono — can be assigned to any of the three programmable function buttons.

More info: audient.com

4. Mixer Safeguards

On-Stage has announced two new mixer covers: the MDA7016, which is designed for 16- to 24-channel mixers, and the MDA7032, for 32- to 48-channel mixers. Both covers are crafted from a soft, lint-free, weather-resistant material that keeps audio mixers, or similarly sized audio devices, from gathering dust when not in use while also protecting them from damage caused by debris, UV rays and moisture.

More info: on-stage.com

5. Monitor Refinement

The SCM25A Pro Mk2 from ATC is a compact, three-way active monitor that maintains the core of its predecessor while refining key areas of design and performance, including replacing the original's OEM high-frequency driver with the British manufacturer's own "S-SPEC" SH25-76S soft-dome, dual-suspension tweeter. As an active studio monitor, the SCM25A Pro Mk2 is based around a 6.5-inch bass driver loaded in a ported/ vented enclosure, tuned to 32kHz and featuring a 3-inch diameter port with flared entry and exit to minimize port air noise.

More info: atc.audio/en

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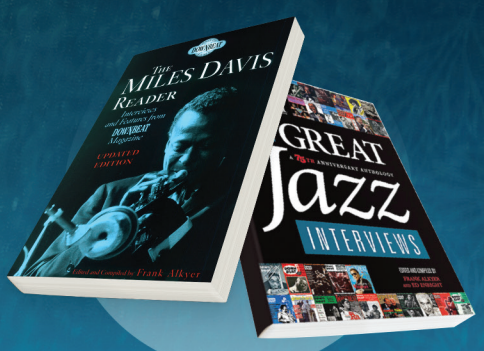

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Symphonic Swing, one of the groups at the Charleston Jazz Academy, performs.

JB MCCABE PHOTOGRAPHY

Jazz Academy Bolsters the Scene in Charleston

NEW ORLEANS IS OFTEN CALLED THE "birthplace of jazz," and it certainly has an incredibly rich musical heritage that supports that claim. But jazz also developed from African roots in other Southern cities, especially in Charleston, South Carolina, strongly influenced by Gullah musical traditions from the nearby sea islands.

Charleston's jazz roots continue to thrive these days, thanks to the efforts of the non-profit organization Charleston Jazz — and especially its educational component, the Charleston Jazz Academy.

Founded in 2008, Charleston Jazz has established an annual four-day Charleston Jazz Festival that takes place each April, presents the Charleston Jazz Orchestra in an annual six-concert series, funds research into Charleston's jazz roots — especially surrounding the renowned Jenkins Orphanage Band, which toured across the nation and Europe from the late 1800s through the 1920s, as well as the Gullah culture's influence on jazz — and established the Charleston Jazz Academy in 2017.

"The Jazz Academy was the missing link in our mission," said Tatjana Bellot, executive director of Charleston Jazz. "That mission is to cultivate jazz performance and outreach, preserve the history here, which connects to the amazing musicians who learned this art form at the Jenkins Orphanage like Freddie Green, Cat Anderson, Jabbo Smith and others. Now we have the opportunity to build on this legacy and carry it forward by teaching academy students to play jazz."

Basil Kerr, current director of the Charleston Jazz Academy, led award-winning high school band programs for four-plus decades in the Charleston area before retiring from the Charleston School of the Arts and joining the academy. In configuring the new Jazz Academy, Kerr and David Carter, the first director, had conversations with jazz education and performance non-profits around the country.

"When we started, we talked with similar jazz organizations, and one of them was Jazz St. Louis," explained Kerr. "Their structure is a little different, but they do a wonderful job with their education components, which are very goal-centered. It was a good model for us, so we didn't have to reinvent the wheel for our program."

"Once the Jazz Academy was up and running, the pandemic hit," Kerr said. "David was offered a job as a professor at Coastal Carolina University, so I volunteered to take over for a year. We eventually got the students back, added new faculty, and Tatjana asked me to write up a job description for the director's job. After I turned it in, she told me I had just described myself and offered me the job. I believed very strongly in the mission of the academy, and reaching students at smaller schools that don't have all the resources of suburban schools. So I accepted the job, and one of my goals is to make the playing field a little more level for all students."

Since its founding, the Jazz Academy has expanded from teaching private lessons to adding jazz combos in 2021. In 2022, the academy offered a two-week summer combo camp — expanding the combo camp to four weeks in 2023, with each week based around a specific jazz style. Kerr asked Gavin Smith, a graduate of Berklee and the academy's trombone/combo instructor, to run the camp.

"It turned out to be a groundbreaking experience for me," recalled Smith. "I could see the benefits of being able to help young students express themselves through music — especially in a one-week intensive camp. The four one-week camps had different themes. Week one was traditional and swing, week two was bebop and cool jazz, week three was contemporary and fusion style and week four was Latin jazz."

"We now teach combos at the beginning, middle and advanced levels," added Kerr. "And in our honor combo, five of the six students made it to All State Jazz, and the piano player is only a freshman. It's great to have groundbreaking things like that happen!"

The Academy also follows through on its commitment to a "level playing field" for students. Tuition is charged for individual lessons, classes and summer camp sessions, but scholarships are offered to students who need financial assistance.

During the 2022–'23 school year, the academy had an enrollment of 100 students who participated in private lessons and combo classes after their regular middle school or high school classes. In addition, the academy also has a home school band, with the students coming in the mornings for class.

"We also recently started an adult combo," added Tatjana, and there's been a lot of interest. It's really neat to see them coming back to music, and it also helps develop an adult audience for this art form of jazz."

The academy also hosts workshops designed to prepare high school music students for regional and All State jazz auditions, provides passes to students to enable them to attend Charleston Jazz Orchestra concerts for free and brings in an annual artist-in-residence to work in local schools and with academy students — as well as performing in concert with the Charleston Jazz Orchestra. Jon Faddis and Sean Jones were artists-in-residence the last two years, and Stefon Harris will be at the academy this year.

"Through jazz, we're trying to instill in them the opportunity to improvise and express themselves," concluded Smith. "We try to provide them with the skills necessary to express yourself and communicate in other areas as well, and help them address social anxiety and depression — real issues for young students."

—Terry Perkins

Charles McPherson

"I might not have felt this way 30 to 40 years ago, but I've reached a point where I can hear value in what people do, even if it's not how I'd do things," alto saxophone grandmaster Charles McPherson said during his second DownBeat Blindfold Test. Famously a sideman with Charles Mingus between 1960 and 1972, with 24 leader albums to his name, McPherson demonstrated that he is playing as strongly as ever during a searing Charlie Parker tribute concert at New York's Tompkins Square Park on the last weekend of August. All of that at the age of 84.

Sonny Red

"Ditty" (*Breezin'*, Riverside, 1960) Red, alto saxophone; Barry Harris, piano; Bob Cranshaw, bass; Albert "Tootie" Heath, drums.

Barry Harris on piano. The alto player is Sonny Red. I can't identify the bassist and drummer. Sonny Red was from Detroit. He was seven years older than me. When I was learning how to play at 14–15, he was already *the* alto player in Detroit of note. He impressed me for understanding and dealing with Bird's language. I didn't study him, but he got my attention as someone whose level I could aspire to. I liked the tune. Sonny's solo is impressive. He's constructing intelligent musical sentences that connect seamlessly, which is the most important part of linear playing. From the energy of Barry's flow, it's probably from around 1960. 5 stars.

Steve Coleman/Von Freeman/Greg Osby

"It's You" (*StrataInstitute–Transmigration*, Rebel-X/Columbia, 1991) Osby, alto saxophone; Freeman, tenor saxophone; Coleman, alto saxophone, composer; David Gilmore, guitar; Kenny Davis, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.

Something about the tonality of the composition sounds Mingus-like. There's two alto players, but I can't identify them. The tenor player sounds in a way like Warne Marsh, but not really. As I hear it, everybody's rhythmic concept — the phrasing — sounds the same; the saxophone technique and articulation is spot-on. It's not necessarily my cup of tea aesthetically, but it gets my attention. I can learn from listening to it. 4 stars.

Gary Bartz

"April In Paris" (*Bird At 100*, Smoke Sessions, 2019) Bartz, alto saxophone; David Kikoski, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

Gary Bartz. I don't know who the rhythm section is. I hear a strong Coltrane influence his approach to playing ballads in addition to the Bird thing. Intonation is good. He's very sensitive playing the melody. 4 stars.

Brian Lynch Big Band

"The Struggle Is In Your Name" (*The Omni-American Book Club*, Holistic, 2018) Lynch, trumpet, composer; Donald Harrison, alto saxophone soloist.

Randy Brecker on trumpet? Whoever it is has a nice sound. Oh, it's Brian Lynch. The alto player has both a very vertical and modal approach. I can hear that bebop information is part of his musical self, with a strong Coltrane influence mixed in. Of course, you can't take bebop out of Trane, because he comes from that tradition. The composition was well-played. Whatever the arranger was trying to do, they met the task. 4 stars.

Miguel Zenón/Luis Perdomo

"Mucho Corazon" (*El Arte Del Bolero–Part 2*, Independent Release, 2023) Zenon, alto saxophone; Perdomo, piano; Eva Elena Valdelamar, composer.

The tune is gorgeous. Something about the approach, the sound and the phrasing reminds me of later-period Lee Konitz, though it's different. The rendition, approach and artistry were spot-on. A very sensitive interpretation, with an interesting choice of notes, all quite logical. A compelling style. I have no idea who it is. Is the pianist Fred Hersch? 4 stars.

ANTONIO PORCAR CANO

"He's constructing intelligent musical sentences that connect seamlessly, which is the most important part of linear playing," Charles McPherson said of alto saxophonist Sonny Red.

Lakecia Benjamin

"Trane" (*Phoenix*, Whirlwind, 2023) Benjamin, alto saxophone, composer; Victor Gould, piano; Ivan Taylor, bass; E.J. Strickland, drums.

Kenny Garrett? Mulgrew Miller on piano? Is the alto player living? I won't be able to identify them. I don't know if it's a Trane tune, but spiritually, in every way, the approach is about Trane. The alto is close to the soprano in the higher pitches, and this person's approach relates to the way Trane played soprano — on a conscious or subconscious level. I like the articulation, harmony and choice of notes. This tune has a particular vibe, and they hold true to it. 4 stars.

Sherman Irby & Momentum

"Sybad" (*Cerulean Canvas*, Black Warrior, 2017) Irby, alto saxophone, composer; Wynton Marsalis, trumpet; Vincent Gardner, Eliot Mason, trombone; Eric Reed, piano; Gerald Cannon, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

Phil Woods and Tom Harrell come to mind. I hear a little of Phil Woods' nuance in the alto player's phrasing; good sound and articulation. I liked the trumpet player's approach. Good upper register. The improv approach seemed appropriate to what the composition is about. It's well-thought-out. 4 stars. [*afterwards*] Wynton's sound and approach have changed a bit since early on. I'm used to hearing Sherman play repertoire that's harmonically different with Wynton's band.

Jim Snidero

"Old Man River" (*Live At Deerhead Inn*, Savant, 2022) Snidero, alto saxophone; Orrin Evans, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

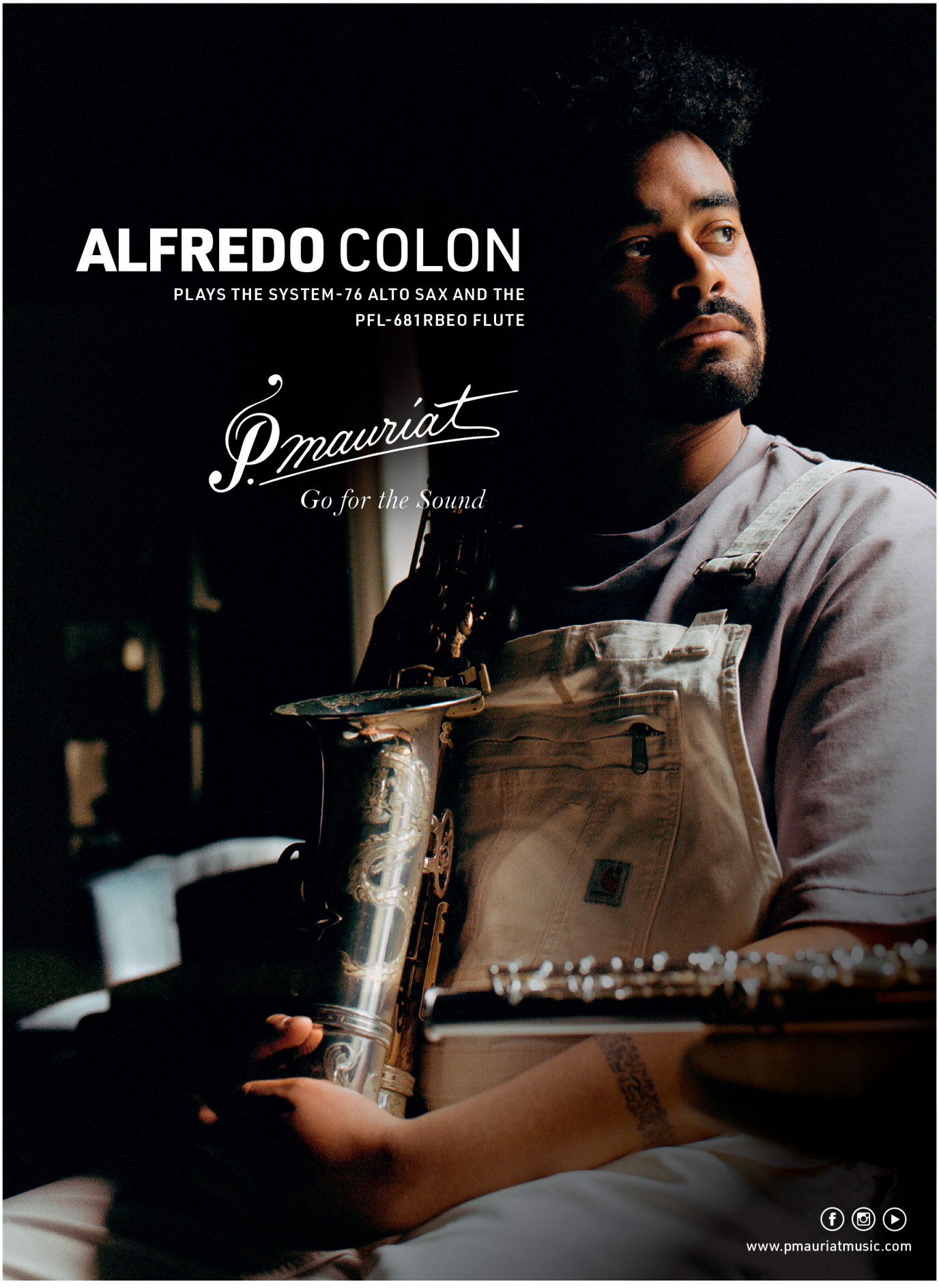
"Old Man River" is an unusual tune choice. The pianist played interesting substitutions, and moved in and out of the harmony artfully. Mulgrew Miller comes to mind again. The approach was thoughtful, almost tender — I liked the mood they evoked. The alto saxophonist understands the bebop language, and played the mood and vibe of the arrangement and the tune. 4 stars.

Alexa Tarantino

"Surge Capacity" (*Firefly*, PosiTone, 2021) Tarantino, alto saxophone; Art Hirahara, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

This alto player brings Antonio Hart to mind. 4 stars. [*afterwards*] All the players I've heard today have good technique. A bunch of young, talented people have popped up, who I haven't heard enough to be able to identify. But they all interest me. I'm going to go practice now! **DB**

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.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